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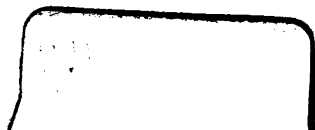


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**ALL
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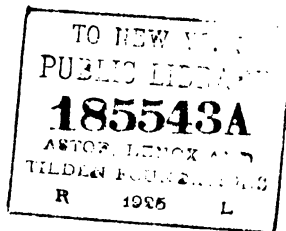
ELI OF THE DOWNS

BY
C. M. A. PEAKE

"None know me as I am
Steering to strange adventure."
—CHANG Jo-Hu,
A Lute of Jade.)

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GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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TO
R. L. BAYLIFF

Never again,
Written or spoken,
Can any word of mine reach out to you,
Yet take this book from me, it is your due,
The bond between us twain
Is still unbroken.

CONTENTS

I: ON WINCHCOMBE DOWN

CHAPTER	PAGE
I I MEET ELI	II

II: YOUTH

II HOW ELI CAME TO BOURNE	19
III KALEIDOSCPIC	28
IV TWO FAREWELLS	35
V THE STILE AT THE CROSS-ROADS	48
VI MR. TALLIS	60
VII MARY	67
VIII WINTER AT THE UP FARM	75

III: THE NESTING SEASON

IX LOVE	89
X KEEPING COMPANY	100
XI THE WEDDING	110
XII WINTERSHOT WOODLANDS	118
XIII THE NIGHT IN THE SHEEPFOLD	127
XIV THE TURN OF THE ROAD	141
XV PORT OF DEPARTURE	146

IV: THE SEAFARER

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVI	GLIMPSES	157
XVII	THE GOLDEN IMAGE	166
XXVIII	ON BOARD THE <i>James and Lucy</i>	175
XIX	AT THE WHARFSIDE	184
XX	IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY	192
XXI	ELI COMES BY HIS OWN	200
XXII	ELI GOES ASHORE	208
XXIII	THE NIGHT IN THE BOARDING HOUSE	215

V: A NEW LAND

XXIV	UP COUNTRY	229
XXV	THE SURVEY	236
XXVI	MARTINDALES	245
XXVII	AH FONG RECEIVES A VISITOR	256
XXVIII	A HOME-COMING	267
XXIX	SPRING ON THE RANCHE	275
XXX	A SONG AND A MORNING DREAM	284

VI: AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

XXXI	BUCKLE'S MEADOW	295
XXXII	THE CHINAMAN'S GARDEN	306
XXXIII	DAVY JONES	314
XXXIV	THE SHOT	323
XXXV	ELI GOES HOME	330

VII: BEULAH

XXXVI	ELI SETS ME ON MY WAY	339
XXXVII	A GOOD-BYE	344

I: ON WINCHCOMBE DOWN

ELI OF THE DOWNS

I: ON WINCHCOMBE DOWN

CHAPTER I

I MEET ELI

CLANG! Once more I had come against a wire fence whose strands, yet quivering with the impact, vanished on either side into a grey dimness. The thickening mist fumed round me in slowly moving wreaths and billows and dusk was falling.

There could be no further doubt about it—I was lost upon the downs, not perhaps a dangerous predicament for a strong youth as I was then, but one sufficiently unpleasant upon a raw November evening.

For two hours I had wandered over the undulating grassland in the waning light. Now and again I had passed a thorn tree whose gnarled and spiny branches seemed, as I approached, actually to pierce through and tear the veils of sevenfold gossamer the fog was weaving round them. Twice I had come upon a fence, passed it and gone on. Now here was another.

Another? Or the same? I might have circled back. I could not tell.

This time I would not cross the barrier, I would follow the line.

The ground sloped away under my feet, then rose again—a sharp turn up hill, a level—and the treacherous clue failed me.

The fence came to an end, a jarring coil or two lay on the wet grass at my feet, and beyond there was no more wire, there were no more posts, and the last of the daylight had gone.

Rather from instinct than from any hope of a reply, I shouted, once, twice, then after a pause, again, when to my astonishment a sudden oblong of light shone in the obscurity and I heard a man's voice answer.

"Who's there?" it called, in a grave, clear tone, with a carrying quality in it unlike the choked vowels of the local speech, though the voice itself had the indescribable downland intonation.

I was so much surprised at this opening of a door in the wilderness that for a moment I did not speak, then with an absurd, half-conscious recall of the penny dreadful stories of my childhood, I cried,

"A friend!"

That was my first meeting with Eli Buckle. He took me into the kitchen of his little house and gave me food and tea from a pot on the hob, then, while I ate, he turned to an odd-shaped piece of wood and began to work upon it in silence.

I looked closer—it was the scroll of a fiddle. Fiddle making was a hobby of his, he told me, as he noted my interested glance. He had made many violins, one time or another. Couldn't play himself anything to speak of. Didn't sell them. No. Just gave one now and again to some youngster who had a fancy for music. His weren't anything much, of course, but he'd heard say that a good old fiddle might be worth something. Was that so?

As I smoked and he carved, the slow talk drifted to things not usually of interest to dwellers in the thatched

cottages hidden here and there in the folds of the down. Among other subjects a hobby of my own was touched on, and my host took a candle box down from a shelf.

Within it, beneath a dog-eared copybook, lay about a dozen flint implements which he told me he had picked up in the neighbourhood. Among them were two or three arrow heads of black obsidian and a small glass phial banded with red and gold paper, such a phial as the Chinese use for holding "headache medicine."

I took up one of the arrow heads.

"North American?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I lived in British Columbia once. Had a bit of a ranche there. I went up from the coast before the C.P.R. was finished."

I pricked up my ears at that, for I too had been in British Columbia.

He rose to put the box away. As he did so a small piece of paper fluttered to the floor and I stooped to pick it up. It had evidently been torn from the page of a magazine. In giving it back I caught sight of the first line of a poem.

"Amida! circled with glory," it ran, and this added to the surprises of the evening, for one does not look to find hymns to Buddhas in candle boxes on Winchcombe Down.

The owner replaced the scrap and the copybook in the box, shut down the lid, and set it again upon the shelf.

With true Colonial hospitality he took it for granted that I should stay the night, and since I refused to turn him out of his only furnished bedroom, he gave me a shake-down on a sort of home-made divan in a corner of the kitchen near the fire.

After that I saw a good deal of Eli, and the following summer I arranged to lodge with him for the Long Vacation. He put a little very simple furniture in his two

empty rooms and they served me for bedroom and study. One could not desire a quieter place to read in than Beulah Cottage on Winchcombe Down.

The first time he spoke to me of his youth was, as I remember, upon a Sunday in June. We were lying out on the highest point of the ridge of downs that runs behind his house.

Spread out before us a blue and sunlit world lay dreaming in a haze as full of opalescent colour as a soap bubble, and almost at our feet a grey church couched at the base of the steep green declivity.

The bells were ringing for service, presently the chime fell to a single clangour, ceased, and after a silence a faint noise of voices speaking in unison, drifted up to us on the height above.

"Hear 'em buzz?" said Eli. "Like flies in a bottle down there."

He smiled, then plucked a little flower from the grass by his side, and holding the sweet-tasting stalk with his lips, munched it thoughtfully.

The buzzing ceased and a thin trickle of psalmody rose in its stead.

"An' to think I was a choir boy once," he continued. "Parson Walker an' his wife, 'twas they that taught me. Used to be a band in church before his time. Fiddle, bassoon and trombone, my old granfer used to say. But Parson Walker done away with all that. Mrs. Walker, she played 'pon one of those puff-wheeze boxes. What-d'ye-callums? Harmoniums, that's it."

"They have organs in most of the churches round here now," I said.

"Maybe. I don't know. Church and chapel I've done with them, this many a long year gone."

Then in the voice to one who quotes to himself,

"To worship a spirit about whom you know nought be mere slavishness."

My acquaintance with Eli was then still recent enough for me to be surprised at this quotation from a famous Chinese classic.

"Confucius was a wise man," I said, for want of a more original remark.

"Never heard tell of him. 'Twas a man called Kwon-foot-zer said what I told you."

"The same," I answered. "Confucius is the western form of the name."

"Do you mean to say people here in England, parsons and ministers and folk, know about *him*?" Eli asked, sitting up with one of those sudden youthful gestures of his, which always came to me as a surprise in their contrast to his usual quiet movements, and middle-aged, even elderly appearance.

"Some of them know, and all of them might know, if they liked," I answered. "Why do you ask?"

"And they never tell us," he said.

He stared hard at the distant horizon. A crying of sheep rose from an unseen fold. Eli listened a moment and his face stiffened painfully.

"They never tell us. We may live and die and never know."

He threw out his hand.

"I'd like to see . . ." he began, and checked himself.

"Go on," I said laughing. "Relegate them all to the infernal regions, if you like. It won't hurt me—or them either."

Eli shook his head.

"No, that's foolishness. Hell's home-made—always. Besides, parsons and such might tell, but—that's not the same as knowing. 'Twas only to-day somehow put me thinking of years gone by."

Then, not looking at me, but at the wide stretch of land below us, he began to speak of his childhood and youth, though on that first afternoon he did not tell me all, or even much of what I came to know later on.

I will not try to tell the tale in Eli's own words. It does not seem to me that it was by his words that he gave me most of what I have gained from him. Often after we have been together I have wondered to find how little I could remember of what he actually said.

I was young in those days and impressionable, and (to use one of his own phrases when, as was often the case, he dropped back into the dialect of his youth) I "seemed to 'a caught the knack o' hearkening to him a-thinking."

He was a strange man, or so he seemed to me, and I cared for him enough to value that power greatly.

I would not tell his story now did I not know that there are none to be hurt by it. Even so I have thought it best to change many names.

Bishop's Oldbury and Ewebourne Vale are not so marked upon the map of England, nor can the signature of Mr. Dod be found upon any map in the glory holes of the Government of British Columbia.

As for Eli himself, I do not believe that it would have displeased him to know that I should spend the leisure of a long convalescence in making a memorial to our friendship.

Perhaps, however, if he could read this book he would smile over the form the tribute has taken.

II: YOUTH

II: YOUTH

CHAPTER II

HOW ELI CAME TO BOURNE

She sprang, she grew, she fenced her life with care,
Blooming she lured the Bee to find her fair.
She died, and all to cast a little seed
Adrift upon the air:

THE THISTLE.

DURING his life I never learned the story of Eli's birth, and how it was that he came to be brought up by his grandparents at Bourne. I do not know how much he knew about it himself. Old Anne Brown knew something, and after Eli's death she showed me a letter that had dropped from the holland cover of a hymn book of his when she was dusting it. This and a big prayer book to match had belonged to Eli's grandmother, an old friend of Anne, and when he went abroad he had given both to the latter and refused to take them back on his return. His other books Eli had left to me, and Anne was giving them house room till I could claim them. They were not many—a couple of cheap histories, a small volume or two of translations from Confucius and Lao Tzu that I myself had given him (I found they were mostly uncut), Percy's Reliques, and a copy of Josephus in an eighteenth century binding. Besides these Eli had left me one of his fiddles, his flints and the copy book of

which I have already spoken, and of which I shall make mention again.

Of course these details properly belong to the end of this tale, but the letter concerns the beginning. That is why I give it here.

It was written on a frayed sheet of cheap paper, old and creased, in a hand, shaky indeed, and illiterate, but marked with a good deal of character, and it ran thus:—

“14 Cunningham Row,
Lavender Hill, London,
November 1st.

“MY DEAR MOTHER AND FATHER,—I hope this letter will find you well and I think you will be surprise to hear from me after such a long time and I suppose you thought as I was very unkind not to write before but O dear Mother I couldnt I don't know how I am going to tell you now and Father wont never forgive me not if he listens to Emily but I hope he wont for the sake of the child I have been a bad girl you will say and so I was to tell you a lie for I never was married like I told you in my last letter because I thought it would break Fathers heart if he knew and I have laid awake thinking you was fretting because I never came home nor never wrote and my heart was broke God knows but I couldnt tell you that I been very ill and I dont think I can last long now and I shouldnt be sorry for that only for my baby Dear Mother I worked hard for my baby from the time it was born and that's what is going against me now oh dear Mother and Father dont let my baby go to the Workhouse when I am gone If I been a bad girl and indeed I never meant to but I cant tell you about that, but the baby never done anyone else any harm only me, and you was always good to me when I was a little one I remember Mother getting the aprons for me going to service, same

as if it was yesterday so do dear Mother and Father take my baby I havent got the strength to come or Id bring him, only maybe you wouldnt want to see me but I know Mother would I cant write any more now so I will close with love to both my Honoured Parents.—

“JESSIE BUCKLE.”

“Dear Mother this is kisses from me and the Baby.”

Followed a row of scratchy crosses drooping downward across the bottom of the sheet.

Anne Brown told me that this Jessie was the younger daughter of a shepherd, John Buckle and Alice, his wife, who lived, as their forefathers had done, in the parish of Bourne, on the banks of the Ewebourne, a little river that runs between the White Horse and the Hampshire downs through some of the most loveable country in England.

The Buckles were “folk everyone thought well on.” Their only boy had died as a child, and before this tale begins, Emily, their elder daughter, had married and gone to live at Basingstoke. Anne remembered Jessie as a big girl at school when she herself first went there—a pretty girl, Anne declares, with light brown hair, who went into service with a London family, was said to have married, and soon after died.

According to Anne “most folks thought as there was something queer but no one knew what, but anyway Master Buckle and Dame Buckle went up to London or somewheres and then they came back in the carrier’s cart from Oldbury, and she had a new black shawl with something rolled in it, and next morning she shewed me a dear little baby.”

“She was kissing it and crying over it,” Anne told me, “and said it put her in mind of her boy as died. And the Shepherd, he up and says gruff like, “I ’oodn’t say that

if I was 'ee," a' said, "my boy come o' honest folk." But Mrs. Buckle, she said, "Hush, John," stern like, which wasn't her way, she being a pleasant-spoken woman, and the Shepherd, he whistles his dog and goes out, and 'ceptin' that Eli was always called Eli Buckle, that was all I or any of us learned, for the Buckles weren't folk to talk when they'd liefer be silent. But the Dame, she fair worshipped that child, an' I never knew Master Buckle unkind to 'un though I've a-seen 'un look at 'un queer like now an' again when 'a grew bigger. But there! I was a young woman by then and 'twasn't the way Master Buckle looked that I was thinking of."

Anne's narratives are usually of the breathless order, and this one finished with a fit of coughing.

"Ah! Anne was thinking o' summun a bit younger nor Shepherd Buckle," echoed her old husband from his chair by the fire. "Her was just about making up her mind to marry me then, and marry me her 'ood, and her did a bit later."

Anne smiled as consciously as a girl in her teens and shook her becapped old head at her spouse.

"'A done, Amos," she said, "I wonder you bain't ashamed to tell such lies, and at your age too."

I learnt many things about Eli from the Browns at one time or another. They seem to have played the part of Chorus, or rather the parts of *Compère* and *Commère* in the drama of his life, or at least that is how I see them.

Eli once read to me a little Oriental parable which, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, he choose to attribute to Confucius. I found it afterwards in the copybook I have already spoken of, and it ran thus:—

"When I went to the Tea House, fine writing materials were given to me and I was asked to compose a poem. Then other guests drew near and read what I had written,

but I do not think that either they or I knew what was really inscribed upon the silk."

This appears to me to be a true saying, whoever may have been the author, and especially true of the man who repeated it to me.

To return to his birth and parentage, what I have told above is all I ever knew of that of my friend Eli Buckle.

But I know a good deal about his childhood. He took pleasure in recalling it, and had the gift of making me share his pleasure.

I can see the young Eli in his petticoats and grubby little pinny as he ran about the cottage and garden or strayed out into the lane. There is a steep pitch of wayside bank where speedwell drops frail blue blossoms in the spring, and a strip of footpath, dusty in summer and edged with a long puddle in times of rain, that I recognise with as intimate a thrill as if I had scrambled and splashed about them in petticoats myself.

As Eli grew bigger and his world also increased in size, he found his way to the forge and the blacksmith's shop. The blacksmith was gruff and swarthy and hairy, and did not encourage little boys, and was altogether rather a personage to be dreaded, though the roaring bellows and sparks and hot metal among which he lived had a menacing fascination all their own. The wheel-wright, on the contrary, was a silver-haired, kindly man who let Eli play among the fragrant shavings in his thatched shop, where the light fell greenly through dusty windows, on nails and screws, and bolts and planks and black bottles with feathers in them and a hundred interesting things beside. There the carter lads would bring the lumbering farm waggons to be repaired or re-decorated in blue and scarlet, or green and yellow, or other of the gay-coloured paints which were displayed in streaks upon the gateposts. Mr. Black would sing at his work and his plane made an

entrancing noise as it tore along the wood, especially when the wheelwright was doing finer work, such as making coffins, which was not often, as Bourne was a healthy place.

About this time Eli added the word "Paradise" to his vocabulary, and asking his Granny what it meant, received an answer, orthodox no doubt, but which left him with the impression that this delectable place, sung of in hymns, was something like a larger wheelwright's shop; it seemed also probable that a harp and a plane were much alike, and that angels wore grey side whiskers and sang "Charlestown Races" and "Cheer, boys, cheer," like Mr. Black.

Eli's grandfather did not wear side whiskers, but shaved the regions about his lips, leaving a sandy-grey fringe round his chin. Being somewhat old-fashioned in his tastes, he clung to the garb of his youth—corduroy trousers, and the picturesque smock-frock made of greyish linen worked in white or blue thread, completing his costume with a red neck handkerchief, and a shaggy top hat for Sundays. Thus dressed he attended morning service except during the lambing season, when his work often kept him in the pens both by day and by night. Whenever the Sunday cooking allowed of her absence, "Grandmer" went with him, dressed for her part in a full skirted gown, a woollen shawl and a black coalscuttle bonnet made of puckered silk, lined with an elaborate white quilling in whose intricacies Eli took great pride. Grandmer and the boy sat in the women's seats in the south aisle under the panelled gallery in which Churchwarden Stubber and his family were enthroned, and over his head Eli could hear how that dignitary shuffled his feet if the sermon exceeded half an hour. "Grandfer" sat in the north aisle with the men, and by preference close to a monument of a knight and his lady. Bourne children

always called these effigies Adam and Eve for reasons unknown to themselves or to anyone else.

Eli generally fell asleep during the Litany, and Grandmer would take him on her knee and give him a "peppermint sucker" if he woke up before service was ended. At home her prayer book and hymn book each lived in a holland cover, but she carried them to church wrapped in a clean white handkerchief, placing a posy of flowers on top during the greater part of the year, and sprigs of "Lad's Love," fresh or dried, to mark "the places," for Grandmer was a good scholar and Grandfer too, though he troubled himself but little with printed matter as a rule.

And then there were the Sunday dinners, always with a bit of "pig's mate" for "flesher's mate" was then a luxury almost untasted by labouring folk. There were also dumplings. Such dumplings! Suet or baked apple or "dunch" dumplings, as the case might be.

In the afternoon John would sometimes take Eli and the bob-tailed dog Towzer, for a stroll. If sheep were penned anywhere near, Eli always begged to visit them, and John would lift the child up till he could see over the hurdles and watch the woolly backs, huddled and heaving, and the black muzzles all pointed Towzer-ward with the sunlight shining redly through the pricked ears.

"They do stink, Grandfer," he would say when the sheep were penned on roots, and the pungent odour of mutton and trodden turnips filled his nostrils, and John would never tire of explaining what a healthy smell it was and how he'd heard tell as Lunnon folk as were weak-chested would walk miles to snuff a sheep-fold.

Then perhaps Grandfer would foregather with some shepherd crony, and Eli, holding tight by John's finger, would listen solemnly to endless technical discussions of Tegs and Lambing Yows, and how raddle marks had best be placed in order to differentiate between "twoters" and

"fourters," and both from "sixters," and all three of them from the eight-year old ewes with a full complement of teeth, or, as the shepherds said, "wi' closed mouths," and whether the old system of leaving the flock waterless in winter was better or worse than the modern plan of keeping a "trow" in the pens.

Then would come tea and a "lardy cake," and then John would go off to service again, but after Eli came Alice would stay at home in the evening and teach him little hymns or tell Bible tales, and from them would drift off to reminiscences of her own youth and that of a black nanny goat called Posy, of whose doings Eli never tired of hearing.

At half past six Grandmer would put her darling to bed, first making him say "Our Father," and

"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on."

Then for a Sunday treat she would sit by his side and sing him to sleep or read him a piece from the "Good Book" which had an even quicker soporific action as a rule.

Not always though, for sometimes Eli wanted explanations.

"Why does it say: 'No man hath ever seen God at any time?'" he demanded one Sunday soon after his sixth birthday.

"Because no one never hasn't, deary," Alice answered tranquilly.

"Well, I did, in church this morning."

"You was asleep, deary, and dreamed it."

"No, I wasn't, Grandmer."

Alice looked at the grave little face on the pillow and was struck with the intent look of the hazel eyes. Then

she remembered that Eli had not slept or rubbed his dusty boots on her dress during service but had been exceptionally good and quiet.

"Tell me about it, deary," she said, pushing up her spectacles and closing the Bible.

Eli began twisting the thin wedding ring on his grandmother's wrinkled finger.

"It was all like that," he said, "yellow and shiny, and God was sitting on a big round chair, only it wasn't a chair, and there were funny trees, all shiny too, and people saying their prayers. I *did* see it, Grandmer," he ended, with a half-questioning lift of his voice.

"And what then, deary?"

"I . . . I don't know. I fink I . . . came back."

Alice was silent awhile.

"There's another place in the Good Book where it says as some people does see God, and those be the pure in heart, my lambie," she answered at last. "Now you must go to sleep."

But Eli held to her hand.

"Tell me about Posy first," he pleaded with his most engaging smile, rubbing his tow coloured head against the old woman's arm.

"Not to-night, deary. Grandfer'll soon be home."

"Then sing 'Now the day is over.'"

So Alice sang in her soft husky voice till the clasp of the small fingers relaxed and she stole away, leaving Eli asleep in the twilight of the little attic.

Ah! the beloved little room, nest of so many dreams, the sleeping and waking dreams of earliest youth. To Eli, I think, no temple, West or East, could ever be as holy as that white-washed shrine, perfumed with the mingled odours of bacon and apples and onions, and wood smoke from the open hearth, and the fire "as 'oodn't draw" in the room below.

CHAPTER III

KALEIDOSCPIC

ABOUT once a year, either at Easter or Midsummer, Eli's Aunt Emily and her husband, Uncle Joe, paid a visit to the parents of the former.

Emily, according to Anne Brown, was the kind of woman who "was allus doin' her duty by folks." I know that Eli as a child disliked and feared her, and the old people, I fancy, shared the latter sentiment in a milder form. Anne hated her, and never at any time concealed the fact.

"Tried to do her duty by me once," Anne told me with a vindictive sniff. "'Twas when I was walking out with my old sweetheart here afore we was regular keeping company."

"Her didn't do it twice I warrn't," commented Amos, who was sitting in his accustomed place indoors, but wearing his hat, by reason of having "cotched a cold as made the inside of his head feel like a nest o' emmets."

Since Eli should never have been born, it would appear that it was Emily's duty to treat him as if he did not exist, except on occasions when she wanted some service of the child. Anne had a talent for mimicry, and would enact little scenes in which Emily figured, with much spirit and humour.

"Fancy I can see her now, drivin' over in Smith's dog-trap from Oldbury, sittin' up in her black silk and her dolman, an' her bonnit wi' purple asters an' black beads a-twiddlin'. She'd come in an' kiss the old folk like my

Dorking hen a-pecking an' then, 'stead of taking off her things and settin' down comfortable, she'd begin fidgettin' about and, 'Mother,' her'd say, 'I don't believe that red table cloth's been off this week. Here, Eli, you take it into the garden and shake it, an' you go with him, Joe, and see he does it properly.' An' when that were done, her'd say, 'An' now you can get a duster an' give that table a good rub up. There don't seem to be no beeswax and turpentine, nor no furnichur polish, which I use myself. Harder than that, child! Put some elbow grease into it! And I can't think, Mother, why you want all them plants in the window, filling it up and making a caddle. Nottingham lace curtains as would wash and get up really nice, would be a deal healthier. You remind me when I get back, Joe, an' I'll send Mother the pair from the back bedroom. It's time I got some new ones there, an' to-morrow Eli can brighten up the brass knobs on the clock.' An' all in Mrs. Buckle's house," said Anne indignantly, "Mrs. Buckle, as always kept everything as nice as nice, bein' a real trying and tidy woman. But *there* . . . Em'ly!"

"Em'ly weren't just clean," Amos remarked, meditatively, "her were right down miserable clean, that's what Em'ly was."

"And Uncle Joe?" I asked.

"Oh, he . . . he was like a chip in a sup o' broth, didn't count for nought one way or turrer."

But if Uncle Joe counted for nothing in Amos' estimation, he was the occasion of a small bit of self-realisation on the part of Eli, brought about through a toy, a six-penny kaleidoscope, which Joe gave to the child on one of his visits.

Eli looked into the tube, and shaking it, was delighted with the shifting patterns of bright colours to be seen inside.

"It is just like when I wink my eyes," he said, but Joe looked uncomprehending.

"You know, Uncle Joe, the colours," Eli insisted, "like you always sees in the dark."

Joe took the toy and squinted down the tube.

"If I saw things like that in the dark, I'd think I'd got 'em again," he said facetiously.

Eli was on fire to know more. What would his uncle think he had got again? But he never learnt, for at that moment Aunt Emily's footfall sounded on the stairs, and child and kaleidoscope vanished through the scullery door with silent swiftness, and the greenery of the garden swallowed them.

Afterwards Eli sat under a hedge by the parsnips and pondered over the matter.

Till he had looked through the magic tube, he had never realised how much he lived in company with the colours of which he had spoken to his uncle. There were always colours in his head, shifting patterns made of colours, and now he came to think of it, there were tunes too. Not tunes such as those you really heard, hymn tunes for instance, but tunes for all that. Surely everyone must have tunes and colours inside them? But Uncle Joe appeared to think otherwise. Eli took up the kaleidoscope again, very thoughtfully this time. Then a wren came slipping through the quickset, scolding an invisible cat, and after that an ant passed along a well-worn trade route towards the nest by the elder tree. This ant was carrying something that looked like the leg of a beetle, and he watched it for quite a long while. When the sun had sunk enough to show redly through the apple tree at the west end of the garden he noticed that a cuckoo-bread-and-cheese plant near him had begun to fold up for the night, and looking closely, saw the leaflets were moving with little jerks like Grandfer's head when he slept in

his chair, as he sometimes did on a wet Sunday. Eli gave a chuckle of delight at the discovery, and then Grandmer came out and the observer had to go to bed himself, and very indignant he was at being forced to exchange a world so full of interest for mere oblivion and immobility.

Eli was seven years old before he went to school, but by that time Alice had taught him his letters, and he had also learned to pull his forelock and say "'S'wawker" in a respectful hiss when the Vicar's wife passed by, this being the recognised local abbreviation of "Good-morning, Mrs. Walker."

Being thus grounded in scholarship and manners, he got on well from the first and was soon promoted from "the Infants" to "Class I." Since these two divisions shared the "little schoolroom" and the services of one instructor, the top boy of "Class I" was expected to exercise authority over the "Infants" should their teacher have occasion to go into the "big school."

Eli was particularly successful here. Always, during the moments of his regency, death-like silence brooded over the class-room. The teacher wondered.

"How do you manage to keep them so good?" she asked.

Eli drooped his pale eye-lashes and shifted his weight from foot to foot, but did not reply.

"Do tell me!"

"I just tries ter in-ter-es' 'em," he said at last with great gravity.

This explained nothing, but one day coming back suddenly into the class-room the Infants' mistress learned how it was done.

On one of the long, ricketty, sloping desks Eli was balancing himself, upside down, and every child sat in his

place, craning forward with parted lips and unwinking eyes, waiting for the expected crash.

The schoolmistress was a wise woman, she smothered her laughter, withdrew noiselessly, and returned, to find Eli sitting unruffled on his form, his slate squeaking loudly under the strokes of a new pencil banded most elegantly about the upper half with a chequered red paper.

"The sort that tastes sweetish and pappy and stains your mouth when you sucks it," Eli said, with a half regretful smile, when recalling this early adventure.

I suppose slates and pencils are as dead as the dodo now, and all the cumbrous, shaky desks cut up for firewood, but Eli thought kindly of these out-moded appliances, for he was very happy at school. Reading was a pleasure to him, writing no difficulty, "'rithmetic" he enjoyed and learned easily. What, however, he really hankered for, was geometry, had either he or his teachers known of the existence of such a science. A set of wooden cubes and prisms, and a cone cut into sections, were kept on the top of one of the cupboards. Cleanliness was not a strong point in the schools of the neighbourhood then, but once or twice in his school days these objects were taken down and he was allowed to dust them. He would take the cone to pieces and build it up again, and arrange the cubes in series. To draw his fore-finger round the sharp edges and trace the curves gave him something of the same sort of pleasure that he derived from the tunes and colours in his mind. Long ago someone had presented these blocks to the Vicar. It was vaguely supposed that if you "learned to draw" special benefit was derived from copying such things, but no one "did drawing" at Bourne in those days, and the cone and its fellows went back to their places and life rolled on as before.

It was not until he had been at school some two years that Eli first had his portrait taken. I have the stiff little

picture before me now. A photographer had come over from Oldbury on the occasion of Anne's marriage to her Amos, and after the wedding group had been "took" Mrs. Buckle had Eli "done." He is in all his wedding finery, new corduroy trousers, a buttoned up cloth jacket to which is fastened an enormous white favour; he wears a dark cap of maritime cut, with a shiny peak, from beneath which a solemn little visage looks out on the world, an absurd infantile version of the face I first saw as that of a man nearing sixty. The nose has already an indication of the meditative droop I knew so well, the eyes steady, with that watching look so often seen in sailors, and shepherds, and sheep-dogs too; the eyebrows, slightly marked, have a humorous kink in the arch, and there is the same look of humour about the mouth with the little obstinate thrust forward of the lower lip above the long oval of the chin. The eyes are widely set and one can guess that the complexion is of that umber-tinted fairness that goes with straight, dust-coloured hair. Not at all a pretty boy was Eli, but there is something about the modelling of the face and the proportions of the figure upon which the eye dwells with a pleasure it is hard to explain.

Perhaps it was because of this that the Parson began to take notice of him, or it may have been merely because he was doing well at school, and his grand-parents were what was called "very good church-people." Whatever the reason, Eli was invited, or rather commanded, to sing in the choir, and with a little practice his voice improved greatly. But somehow he and the Vicarage folk never quite hit things off together. Mrs. Walker ('S'wawker), who led the singing and played the harmonium in church, was not an altogether tactful person, and Eli was more sensitive to shades of manner than he himself was aware. When the choir boys came to practice at the Vicarage, Mrs. Walker, careful soul! would lay down newspaper

paths to keep their hobnails off her carpets. This and other little peculiarities of the same kind amused and ruffled Eli, but on the other hand, the Vicar and his wife were keen musicians and their art went far to tame the savagery that the newspaper highways aroused in the chorister's youthful breast.

And so the placid days went on till Eli was "turned of ten year old."

CHAPTER IV

TWO FAREWELLS

Mark the grey willow! With a laugh she throws
Down on the stream her blossom and her seed,
And giving Silk and Gold-dust, takes no heed
To question whence or where the River flows.

—OTA DOKWAN'S DISCIPLE.

ELI often spoke to me of a certain old Mrs. Thoroughgood who at this time was his chief crony.

I do not mean that he had no friends among his school-fellows; he had many, boys of his own age good enough to romp with or challenge at peg-top and tip-cat when the appointed seasons came round, whom he would chase in such games as Dit, and in whose company he would sometimes condescend so far as to join in "Nuts in May" or other of the more lively singing rituals beloved by the girls. With these friends he would occasionally range the woods and meadows, but as a rule he preferred to make such expeditions alone. He had two reasons for this and never spoke of either. One indeed, he scarcely understood himself, the other was that he delighted in a peculiar sort of illicit hunting. He hunted traps.

He took an almost fanatical pleasure in devising burial places for these engines. Some he drowned in ponds, others he thrust into old rabbit burrows, into the cavities of hollow trees, or hid among the tangled stems and dark leafage of an ivy tod.

He knew the ways and haunts of keepers, who, if left to themselves, delight in setting gins.

They do not take so much pleasure in visiting them, and creatures caught therein may linger for days, maimed and starving, till death in one form or another sets them free. The stronger beats will sometimes manage to escape and drag themselves away, perhaps only to die the more slowly. Eli never forgot a day in his early childhood when a favourite cat had limped home horribly wounded from an adventure of this kind, and from the time he was old enough to range the country alone, no trap that he encountered was seen by its lawful owner again.

There were times, however, when he craved food for his imagination other than what boy-play or solitary prowls could supply, and it was then that he turned to Mrs. Thorogood as a flower turns to the sun.

She was a small, old Irishwoman with a brown face intricately furrowed, from which her eyes twinkled humorously, grey eyes which on occasion would light up as with pale blue flames. She was the widow of a Bourne man who had "gone for a soldier," married in Dublin, and thereafter dragged a lengthening string of snub-nosed children about the world in the train of his regiment. Some of the children had died in the East, some in Canada, or at Gibraltar, or elsewhere. Two or three lived to grow up, and went into the Army themselves. They came home at long intervals on furlough to Bourne, whither Sergeant Thorogood had returned after "the Crimea" to exhibit his wooden leg, and to spend the larger part of his pension and all the evenings of his days at the Catherine Wheel. He died, but his widow lived on in a tiny cottage near the school, and her neighbours treated her with respect tempered with disapproval. They are somewhat slow folk, the people of Ewebourne Vale, and perhaps Mrs. Thorogood found life among them more than a little dull; indeed, when I think of her exile, I fancy under her gay manner the old Irishwoman must have hid-

den much loneliness of soul. Her chief consolations appear to have been three: firstly, a feud with her next-door neighbour, a certain 'Ria Reynolds, also a widow; secondly, a little black bottle of gin; and thirdly, the company of Eli. To him, her house and her conversation were an unceasing stimulus and delight.

Round the walls of her kitchen hung stiff little water-colour pictures of soldiers with wasp waists and staring pink faces, dressed in uniforms of bygone pattern. Perched on fretwork brackets were models of ships in glazed boxes, and a small table covered with a chequered red and blue cloth supported a sandal-wood box, a rosary made of seeds, a pair of embroidered moccasins, and a Chinese fan, while on the mantelpiece stood a nautilus shell flanked by spotted china dogs and almost equally (though unintentionally) mottled shepherdesses. Surrounded by these treasures Mrs. Thorogood would sit and talk. How she would talk! To Eli, brought up among men and women sparing of words except under the influence of anger, her rippling brogue and quick, vivid phrases came as a revelation of the power of human speech.

She told him of elephants and troopships, of cholera and Fenians, and "naygurs," and old, old scandals and comedies from the married quarters of barracks half the world away.

She recounted to him doings of her sons, Terah the sergeant-major, out in China; and Pharaoh, who joined the Company's service and was killed at Cawnpore, and Denis the beloved ne'er-do-well who "took his discharge" when he grew too old to be a drummer boy and wandered away from Canada into the States, and "had niver been heard of again." And when winter drew on and dark fell, and the rain made the roads and fields no cheerful play-ground, Eli would clatter in after tea in his muddy

hobnails, and the small boy and the old woman would hang over the fire in the cavernous open chimney, communing together and well content.

Often the talk would run into a dreamy sing-song monologue on the part of Mrs. Thorogood, as she told of the bad days of the famine in Ireland, and of the wakes and fairs, and the mists on the mountains, and folk who were lost in bogs, and then her voice would drop lower and she would speak mysteriously of the Good Folk, and wraiths and apparitions, or perhaps sing queer old Irish songs, and once or twice, after recourse to the black bottle, she danced for Eli on the red-tiled floor by the light of the flickering fire, whirling her old skirts and pattering her feet with wonderful neatness and agility.

At other times her conversation would turn to the iniquities and ineptitudes of her neighbour. Even this, though the subject was not exciting, would please Eli by reason of the vivacity with which it was treated.

"An' 'tis no wonder her man died on her an' he young, no wonder at all, I'd have done as much mesilf had I been in his place. An' now she do be going out nursing them that is sick. Holy Mary! 'tis sick I'd be at the sight of her, wid her face like a fiddle wid the black fright on it, and turned yellow by that reason, an' I pray to the Saints ivery night that if me time should come before mornin' 'tisin't her that would have the laying out av me corpse, for I couldn't abear her could fingers on me, no I couldn't, an' I believe I'd know it if me sowl was in Paradise even, an' 'twould be a scandal me scramin' out fit to fright the blissid St. Peter himsilf an' make him drop the keys out of his hands down-clashing on the goulden floor."

The narrator stopped to chuckle at her own fantasy.

"What saints do ye pray to about buryin'?" Eli asked gravely. "'Tis Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, for going to bed."

"Indade an' 'tis so long I've lived among the Prodestans that I've half forgotten, an' sometimes I think me own tongue has grown as stiff as if 'twere 'Ria Reynolds herself, twistin' it to the shape o' the spache of these parts, not that I'd be callin' her gruntin' spache indade, more than the pigs I'd be ashamed to even to her, dacent bastes, and I'm not for finding fault with all Prodestans ayther, for there's good and bad among them too, but 'Ria Reynolds, she's a black Prodestan if iver there was one, an' as ignorant as a crow, callin' me out of me name as she does, for the same reason she cudn't be readin' ut if 'twas put plain in print before her."

This was an old grievance and when it came up Eli would hasten to turn the conversation to more interesting topics.

Alice Buckle said little, but I think she neither liked nor approved this queer friendship. Perhaps some jealousy was at the bottom of her objection, the pathetic, patient jealousy of the old when they see the child they have cherished seeking companionship elsewhere, attracted by qualities alien to their own, and finding inexplicable sustenance in what to the anxious onlooker seems little better than husks for the swine.

"Do 'ee come in a bit an' sit still, dearie," Alice would plead. "What good is it for Grandfer to pay the school pence for 'ee if 'ee does nothing but run all the larnin' out of 'ee so soon as 'ee comes home?"

But Eli, at eleven years old, was not to be turned from his purpose, and claimed, though not in words, the right to spend his leisure as he chose.


Perhaps Alice felt the keenest stabs of envy when he would come back from a visit to his old friend, and saying nothing, sit quietly in a corner wearing his most inscrutable expression, his pale eyelashes lowered and a half smile curving his cheek from time to time as he told

over to himself some tale or jest that had specially taken his fancy.

Love and devotion and lardy cakes Alice could give the boy, and a treasure of beautiful memories she never guessed at to lie hidden in his heart till their time came to awaken, but the golden apples of the imagination did not grow in her orchard. The Hesperid who guarded that tree for Eli during his latter school days was a brown-skinned old Irishwoman with a taste for the bottle.

But the sojourn of Mrs. Thorogood in Bourne was drawing to a close.

One Saturday in harvest-time Eli had gone leasing with his grandmother. Their sheaves were heavy and Alice was fatigued with the long hours she had spent stooping to pick up the scattered ears. She left her toil somewhat early and they were on their way home before the gleaners' bell, tolling from the church tower, gave the signal to cease work for the day. As they passed the Catherine Wheel, which stood where two roads met, a man came out from the tap-room and walked beside them. He spoke with a nasal drawl strange to their ears, and his clothes were equally exotic, as was the smiling grace of his courtesy when he took Alice's sheaf upon his own shoulder. Eli regarded him with the unflinching stare of childhood, noting every detail of his black cloth jacket and his trousers with braid down the outer seams, his soft black hat of almost clerical shape, his starched shirt-front with golden studs, shamelessly belied by the flannel cuffs at his wrists, and his black neck-tie knotted in a loose bow under the points of a high collar. One might have imagined so sombre a costume would have achieved an effect quite depressingly respectable, but somehow it gave a totally contrary impression. The face too had something familiar about it. Altogether he interested Eli greatly and when, having deposited Alice's sheaf at her



door, the stranger asked the way to Mrs. Thorogood's cottage, the boy was delighted to act as guide.

Scarcely pausing to knock, he burst in upon his crony with the announcement:

"Here's a furrin' man wants to see 'ee!"

He saw Mrs. Thorogood rise from her chair, look hard at the stranger, and then with a queer little howl of joy, fall on his neck and began kissing him.

Eli felt astounded and shocked, and still worse, left out in the cold. He went off into the fields and switched the heads from all the scabious plants that came handy.

Soon all the village knew that Eliza Thorogood's son Denis "was back from Ameriky wi' money in's pocket" and that she was about to return with him to her old home in Ireland.

Both mother and son were ready to take Eli into their confidence and discuss their plans with him, but seeing how every look and thought of the old woman were for the man, the boy withdrew more and more into himself. Even when all the details of the move were settled, and a furniture van (no less!) stood in the lane surrounded by a scatter of straw and paper, and an outer ring of children, even then Eli was silent and lowering. Even when Mrs. Thorogood, dressed in a new bonnet and shawl, called him into the empty kitchen, Eli set his teeth and choked back the lump in his throat. But when she sat flat down upon the floor, the floor where she had danced for him, and drew him to her, and called him her dear and her darlin', and vowed that she would never forget him but miss him every day of her life, and when she drew forth the nautilus shell from some fold of her raiment and bade him keep it and remember her by it, and how she would pray to the Saints that it might bring him health and happiness, and riches and the music of the world whenever he put it to his ear, with many a soft

word more, Eli gave in. With his small hard arms round her neck, he wept till his sobs shook himself and her, and still sobbing, clutched her while she tied the shell in a bit of old rag that lay handy and stuffed it with difficulty into his jacket pocket.

"From the say ut come," she crooned over him, "an' the sound o' the say ye will always hear in ut: 'tis over the say I do be going from ye, me darlin', but should it iver fall to ye to follow that road yourself, thin may the luck I put upon it make the foam on ivery wave to be a white step for ye on the path to Paradise. An' that's the wish of one that loves ye, an' . . ."

But he never heard the rest, for Denis opened the front door and Eli, clasping his talisman, fled through the back garden and away and up the hill beyond the village, and wandered through woods and briars till dark, and then came home and ate his supper in silence, sleeping that night and some others on a wet pillow, beneath which lay the nautilus shell held tight in a bony little paw.

But at his departure and the arrival of Denis, Mrs. Thorogood's tears dried as by magic. Change and adventure were coming into her life once again and she was as eager as a girl at the prospect. She rose from the floor, shook the dust from her skirt, and taking her son's arm with immense dignity, stepped forth towards the tax-cart that awaited her.

At the next gate stood 'Ria Reynolds, her arms rolled in her apron, her face rigid as usual. An impish flame lit in Mrs. Thorogood's eyes and she began to mince, with airs borrowed doubtless from some Colonel's lady languishing in a feathered bonnet in days before Chillian-wallah.

"So you be a-going away, Liza Thuggud," 'Ria remarked in her flat voice. "Well, I only hopes as how you'll find yourself as cumferable in Ireland as you been

here, though t'ain't hardly likely. One thing I med say, howmever, better neighbours you can't look to get nor what Bourne volk 'a been to 'ee, that I'll vow. Not if you tries the world over, 'ee 'ont."

Mrs. Thorogood swept her a haughty curtesy.

"Whatever neighbours I may have in Ireland, Missis Reynolds," she answered, "they'll be people of enough gentility to understand that when a lady has nine letters to her name folk do be only shewing their own ignorance if they cay'nt pronounce it as 'tis writ."

'Ria appearing completely staggered by this somewhat involved sarcasm, Mrs. Thorogood nipped quickly into the cart, Denis followed, the driver flicked his horse, and Eliza Thorogood, her eyes shining with hope and expectation, went from Bourne never to return.

As the cart disappeared round the corner of the lane 'Ria Reynolds recovered her speech.

"I allus called 'er 'usban' Thuggud," she said, and there was spite in her voice though her face was unchanged, "John Thuggud I call un, and 'is veyther afore that too, Thuggud I called 'em an' I bain't a-goin' to change now, not ver all the blackavized, gin-drinking, chittering Irish apes as ever trod shoe leather, an' no better scholars nor other volk, not if the truth were known."

Meantime, after Mrs. Thorogood's departure, Eli made the discovery that books had their uses outside of church and school, and might even afford pleasurable entertainment should more natural and legitimate sources of amusement fail.

I think a torn copy of "The Seven Champions of Christendom" which fell into his hands by chance, brought this fact home to him, especially when a series of childish ailments led to his spending a good deal of his time indoors.

Alice nursed him and sat up with him when he was

feverish. Perhaps she overtaxed her strength, for all that winter she seemed less active than was her wont, and failed more as the season drew on. Old John said nothing but turned his hand to many little odd jobs about the house when he came in from work, and exacted more service from Eli when he had him under observation.

With the blindness of childhood the boy gave little heed to the change in his grandmother, and resented being kept from his book and his play, and Alice grew more indulgent as John grew more severe. Eli was not happy. He missed Mrs. Thorogood, and down in the depths of himself was haunted with a scarcely conscious foreboding of further grief.

Anne Brown brought the matter to a head one day when she called to exhibit her last new baby to her old friend. The Browns now lived some distance from the village, and Anne was shocked at the change in Alice whom she had not seen for some time. She took occasion to invite Eli to accompany her part of her road home.

"Your Grandmer's looking sadly," she said, "I wish I lived nearer an' could help her a bit now and agin, but you be growing a big boy, my dear—do what 'ee can to save her. 'Tis nature for the old to go first, we all know, but 'tis sad to look back after and think we might 'a done more for 'em whiles they was here. I be older nor you, Eli, an' I learnt that when Mother died a year ago."

Eli was profoundly startled. He had always thought of death as a matter of funerals and grave decorating and general rather pleasurable excitement, never as a thing that might change the course of his own life. He watched Alice, but his untrained eyes could see but little alteration from one day to another. He tried to put disquieting thoughts from him, but they would recur. He became very tender to the old woman in his silent fashion, and Alice brightened under the tokens of his love and care,

so that I think the last months of her life were very happy ones for her in spite of her failing strength.

Anne suggested sending for Emily, but Alice put it off.

"Wait till after her've a-finished her spring cleaning," she said. "'Twould put her about so to leave her house afore that were done and out o' hand. I can do till then with a bit o' help from the neighbours."

She would not have the doctor either. Bourne folk considered that the last expedient to be tried. A cup of mouse-ear tea to ease the cough she thought she might do with, and Eli was sent out to the hedgerows to pluck the herb.

But at last came a day when Alice could not rise from her bed.

"John," she said, "'ee'd best send for Emily now. Her must put off her spring cleaning till afterwards. I'd 'a liked to go on a bit for 'ee and the little lad, but God knows best, an' my work's done."

So Emily was sent for.

I suppose every machine that man has made or will make is a kind of avatar, a mechanical embodiment of some human ideal. Through it the inventor expresses his feeling for character after his fashion as the novelist or playwright does in another medium.

I amused myself developing this notion to Eli once. He sat listening gravely, then chuckled.

"There's a machine I saw in Reading a week or two ago," he said, "new-fangled electric thing for sweeping carpets, Vac . . . Vacuum Cleaner, that's what they called it. I knew a woman like that once. Aunt o' mine, she was."

Doubtless he was thinking of Emily.

She of course was in her element in the house of sickness, and supplied that high light of somewhat sordid humour with which Nature seldom fails to intensify the

shadows of our deeper griefs. Not of course that Emily ever saw herself otherwise than as a ministering angel.

"Having been in good service she knew what was right to be done."

The doctor, a shin of beef for beef tea, a bottle of port wine, and the clergyman, were all sent for in proper sequence, and Emily, "being in comfortable circumstances, thank God," paid for the three first items herself—and said so.

I do not think her attentions disturbed the placidity of her mother's departing spirit, and John and Eli bore them with the puzzled acquiescence of the human male in the rituals appointed for birth and death.

The old woman faded away gradually. She it was who lay in bed now and was soothed to sleep with a "chapter" which she liked Eli to read to her.

She had been drowsy all one day but brightened towards evening and asked for her grandson. The boy came and sat by her, holding her hand while Emily gave her father his supper downstairs.

"Do 'ee remember the times I used to come an' sit by 'ee when 'ee was a little un, Eli?" Alice asked. "I used to tell 'ee about Posy; you was allus asking about Posy then. Why it seems but yesterday that I was playing wi' Posy meself, and then there were me own little uns to tell to, Emily and Willie and your Mother, dearie, and then you. You be a good boy, Ely, an' do what Grandfer tells 'ee."

She smiled and lay still a while, then spoke again.

"I used to sing to 'ee, too—hymns, do 'ee remember? You be a fine singer yourself now, dearie. I'd like to hear 'ee sing 'Now the day is over' afore I goes to sleep."

So Eli sang, clear and sweet, till John and Emily downstairs fell silent to hear him.

"That's a good lad," said Alice softly when he had

finished. "Now light the candle an' go off to your bed. I'll lie quiet a bit till your Grandfer comes up."

Eli lit the candle and stooped to kiss her. She put her arm round his neck and held him a moment, his firm cheek against her soft wrinkled one, his hair ruffled by the frill of her white cap, the light falling softly on the sheet and the patchwork quilt, leaving the greater part of the room in shadow.

"There's a dearie," she said with a little sigh. "I think I'll sleep well to-night."

So Eli stole away as quietly as his boots permitted, leaving the candle burning by the bedside.

Next morning they told him that his grandmother had died very peacefully in her sleep, lying by the side of her old husband who never knew his loss till morn.

CHAPTER V

THE STILE AT THE CROSS-ROADS

HIS grandmother's death marked the end of childhood for Eli. John Buckle, never a demonstrative person, withdrew more and more into himself as the days went on. As is often seen in men of his class and kind, the tie between him and his wife had resembled the inarching of a pair of fruit trees, such as may yet be found in country gardens, more than the wedlock of two human lovers. Nevertheless nearly all that his life had held of colour and romance was inwoven with the old shepherd's memories of the woman he had laid to rest in the churchyard across the river.

Not that he thought of the matter so. In words perhaps he hardly thought of it at all. That part of himself which had been young Alice in his youth, and old Alice in his age, was gone; so had his own lissomness and straightness gone, so had the seasons gone, and so would others pass in their turn. The old dog grieved more outwardly than he, but for dog and man there was yet work to be done, though it came heavier on them both than before. John had the aged countryman's power of putting forth his last reserves of strength in accustomed labour. It is this gift that keeps so many of them at work to the end.

He still tended his sheep in all weathers, and carried his penning hurdles by the iron crow laid across his broad, bent shoulder, a task to try even young muscles not inured to the strain.

But now in the cottage a neighbour's wife must be employed and paid in coin for the service Alice had been wont to give without thought of recompense or even of a grateful word. Henceforth Eli would have to earn a little, and he left school, having already out-stayed most of his contemporaries.

Anne Brown, kind soul, did what she could for the comfort of the two lonely, masculine creatures, but she had a young family growing up around her and could only spare an hour once and again to help on the work to which Alice had devoted all the forces of her life. There were no more extra lardy cakes and dumplings for Eli now, and the house seemed colder, especially of a Sunday evening, but since thinking of these things but added to his grief, boy like, he put his memories aside. He liked the grown-up feeling of going off in the morning dressed in corduroys and leggings, to work on a farm, and as the evenings lengthened and he became accustomed to the fatigues and hardships of his new life, he would join the boy parliaments that met at stiles and cross-roads, conscious of the added importance his status as a wage-earner gave him.

They were queer assemblies enough, these gatherings of the village youngsters, wherein subjects beyond the ken of the adult mind were discussed in hoarse mutterings interrupted by whoops and the snatching of caps and sudden voluble disquisitions given in chorus and at a deafening fortissimo.

Eli was growing a tall lad, well able to hold his own in these celebrations of the tribal mysteries; he was even beginning to be admitted to the outer fringe of that circle of higher illuminati known as "the chaps."

These, the adolescents and young unmarried men of the parish, held their Sunday meetings at a stile commanding the roads to church and chapel. Rather less noisy and

more articulate than the boys, they would not have been the best of associates for a lad as young as Eli but that a certain quality of aloofness in his spirit kept him from suffering much harm.

The aloofness was, however, little apparent to the outside world, which was of the opinion that since his Grandmer's death young Eli Buckle had become "fair owdacious." Anne Brown indeed described him to me as being at this period of his life a "regular radical," a term of reprehension indeed, but untainted by even the faintest political associations in the mind of the ancient dame.

By the unwritten law of the boydom of Bourne attendance at Sunday school ended automatically with secular study, but John Buckle still insisted on regular church-going, and since he had to be present, Eli's love of singing kept him in the choir. At that time church music in retired places conserved some of its eighteenth century liveliness. True, the bassoon and brass viol were things of the past, but many of the hymns were yet sung to fine floriated tunes that offered scope to the individual vocalist, and though various small signs gave "Passon" an uneasy feeling that his chorister was developing along lines that might lead to trouble, yet young Buckle's voice, as long as it kept its childish purity, was an asset. Therefore Eli was steered with a fairly light hand and all went well for a time.

The trouble with his spiritual pastor arrived later on when Eli was between fourteen and fifteen and a candidate for confirmation. He could not trust his voice now, and one Sunday during the first hymn it had failed him, falling suddenly to a croak, whereat the boys near him chuckled. Eli was angry and abashed, and from that moment refused to open his mouth in church, even to speak the responses. Mr. Walker "mentioned" it and was met with silence and an obstinate hump of the shoulder.

The tension grew for a couple of weeks and then Eli, after the fashion of his kind, "took to the brush." He turned aside when any of the power of the village appeared in sight jumping a hedge if no other escape offered. He avoided class and choir practice, and was absent from Church for three Sundays running. Then his grandfather awoke to the situation and threatened a thrashing. Eli went red and said nothing, but next day did not return to the cottage after work, and John Buckle discovered that his grandson had volunteered to help drive a flock of sheep to the fair at Dilsey, fifteen miles over the downs. The lad was away for two nights, then he returned, handed in the sum of his usual weekly earnings, and took up life as before. No word of explanation passed between the man and the boy, but nothing more was said about compulsory church-going. Eli generally went to chapel now when he chose to attend divine service anywhere, but if he went to church he sat in the men's free seats, and the choir and Mr. Walker's class knew him no more.

This refusal of the rite of confirmation rather scandalised the neighbours, even the dissenting portion of them. It was considered to be unfair to his god-parents who in some misty fashion were believed to be answerable for the sins of their god-children as long as the latter remained unconfirmed. Eli's god-parents, however, were unknown to Bourne, and the talk died down.

He worked regularly with the sheep now and proved handy at it. This employment took him away from the village a good deal, often for weeks at a time, to another farm his master owned which lay among the higher downs at the head of the valley. When there he lodged with the carter and his wife who left him much to his own devices. The boy liked the lonely hours he spent high up amid the expanse of fragrant turf where no hedges broke the sweep

of the chalk hills and the few trees were bunched together for protection like frightened sheep. One of these clumps of beeches encircling an ancient tumulus was a favourite haunt of Eli, and here he would often take refuge when the thunderclouds came rolling up from the Vale of the White Horse to break over the high, bare ridges on its rim. Here too he would sometimes foregather with stray gipsies who wandered along the old green roads following the crests of the downs, and who were wont to camp in the thick copses whence they could filch wood for making clothes pegs and other such merchandise, unobserved.

Eli loved to sit and gaze over the blue distances to where the tall chimneys of Swaydon stood beneath him miles away. He learnt to know the down flowers too, whitlow grass, orchids and milkwort, chalk gentian and eyebright, and many another rarely to be found among the richer herbage of his own valley, but it never occurred to him that they had names of their own.

I think of him lying out under a hawthorn tree on a sunny slope, with a rough brown cloak hanging from his shoulders, a bunch of harebells stuck in his battered felt hat, and the blue chalk butterflies flickering round him.

Here he would muse for hours, but always with an eye upon his sheep, while he listened to the quick blood drumming in his veins and sensed within him the dim and crowding impulses of his youth.

How strange a process is that slow inward growth of adolescence. When the child vanishes and the man is not yet formed, and the inchoate being within shuts itself away in an impenetrable sheath of reserve, knowing well with the unconscious wisdom of healthy life, how to draw to itself the sustenance required. To my mind the analogy of a human soul to an insect will bear another interpretation to that usually given. Worm, cocoon and imago may figure life, death and resurrection, certainly

they figure the childhood, youth and manhood of each of us. In some species the grub state being ended, the whole creature inside the pupa case deliquesces to a milky fluid which nevertheless builds itself up very surely into the form preordained for its maturity. When I too was a boy, and kept crawling things in pickle jars, I learned that it was inadvisable to make my chrysalids wriggle even when they were of a kind to respond to my proddings. Such wriggings always ended in deformed wings or other abnormalities when hatching time arrived. Perhaps Eli was fortunate in that during his pupa state no one prodded him much. He was left to his food, his work and his play; to the sun and the wind, and the beauty of unspoiled, solitary places, where he might lie quiet and listen to the great pulses of the earth beating close to his heart.

But though pupæ should not be forced to wriggle, now and again they do so of their own accord, and Eli had his wriggling fits like another.

One of the quaintest, though common enough at his age, was when he suddenly discovered the artistic possibilities of what Anne Brown calls "langwidge," and exploited then after the manner of certain ancient and humorous writers of whom he had never heard.

A gipsy fiddler he had encountered at a sheep fair stood for something in this development. Eli and the fiddler had this in common, they found the world too interesting for either of them to take pleasure in fuddling his organs of observation with beer. Therefore in tavern society both he and the gipsy had conversational advantages over most of their associates. The fiddler was a man of words, and in the soft, wheedling voice of his tribe could tell a tale artistically, or draw the foolishness out of an asinine acquaintance till the spectators guffawed again. Fiddler Bill too, would become vitriolic on occasion, for being also

able to make himself respected with his fists he could give his talents as a speaker free scope. It was these talents which fired Eli to emulation, and since swearing and the use of obscene language are the most easily understood forms of oratory, he soon found that whenever he chose he could ensure for himself a small social success among the rougher labourers and lads with whom he was thrown. He became quite a personage at the stile on Sundays. Several of the other "chaps," duller witted or grosser in feeling than he, imitated his finer flights in their turn and did it badly, but Eli, with the vanity of his age, forgave this for the pleasure their homage afforded him.

Soon the thing became a scandal. Decent folk going to church or chapel were outraged by the comments passed upon them. The Greater Powers of the village took counsel together and the smaller "made representations" quite uselessly. The heavy-footed constable was set to work, but as his own two boys were some of the worst offenders, he was not very zealous. On his approach the group at the stile would scatter, only to reform on the bridge or some other point of vantage, and chased thence, return to its old haunt.

And all the while Eli the ringleader, though touching, or rather wading in pitch, was not defiled.

Big boy as he was, he "used language" much as a child might have done, for the fun of the thing, for the sense of freedom this fresh method of expression gave him, and because of the amusement he found in flustering and confusing solemn elderly people without doing them any real harm. For Eli's was an essentially kindly nature, and though of course he understood their import, he only used his "bad words" as counters in a new and amusing game.

But all through his life, for him "things had a way of coming to a stop sudden-like," as he once told me, and the end of this phase came suddenly.

A girl's face brought it about, not altogether in the conventional manner the phrase might imply. Eli did not know her, for the girl was a "furriner," that is, she came from a village a few miles away. Had she not been a stranger she would have contrived to pass the notorious stile in company rather than alone, for the day was Sunday, and the "chaps" had gathered in force. She was hurrying to chapel and scarcely noticed the group by the hedgeside till a tall young lout greeted her with a coarse gibe. Eli saw her start, and turn frightened, short-sighted eyes towards the speaker. They met his own full.

"'A done!" he growled to the offender, but unheard, and another and a worse insult followed. For a moment the girl did not understand. Then Eli saw her face and neck go burning red, and tears start to her eyes. She put up her hands suddenly as though she had been struck in the face. To Eli it seemed as if he had seen the blow, and as instinctively as if he himself had been smitten he hit out at the speaker and sent him sprawling off the stile and into the road beneath.

The "chaps" were first thunderstruck and then vociferous. Eli said no word. Thought seemed to have stopped for him and time with it, and the whole universe to be molten in the flame of such a passion of anger as he had not felt since his infancy. The big lout squared up at his assailant, but the look on Eli's face frightened him and he backed away. It frightened the other lads too. The girl had vanished unnoted, somehow the "chaps" vanished also, Eli never knew when, and he was alone.

He turned and jumped the hedge into the river pasture, and squelched through the sodden grass unheeding. The sun was shining and yet the light seemed black. "A black light, a black light," he kept saying to himself, and he seemed to be running as he spoke. And then suddenly he

found he was a mile away leaning quite calmly over the edge of a broken lock watching the trout in the shadow of the great scarred beam. He wondered at himself as he stood there.

What had happened? And why was this Sunday afternoon different from others when he had amused himself very well at the stile?

He had been very angry he remembered and something had boiled up in him and then boiled over, "like a kettle" he said aloud.

A little weed grew in a crack of the wood, a stunted poppy, with a rag of pale blossom. Red—like a face.

The whole scene rushed back on him at the thought and the kettle boiled up anew. He lay down on the big beam, flat on his stomach he lay, and he swore and swore and swore.

"'Twas like being seasick," he said to me once, smiling over the reminiscence. "Seems to me as how I must have pretty nigh swore the guts out of me. I don't say as I've never sworn since, but speaking by comparison, from that hour I've been a middlin' clean-mouthed man. I weren't a bit sorry for what I'd done neither, not a mossel, nor I ain't now. I'd done summat I wanted ter do, an' when I found I didn't like it I did it no more. When the fit wore off I went home to supper an' we had chitterlins, for Grandfer he'd just killed a pig. I don't know as I iver tasted better pig's mate in my life. Thirza Price as did for us then could cook well enough when her'd give her mind to it. Her can still, old woman as her be. I'll take 'ee over to see her one o' these days." Eli always fell back into the true old Wessex speech on the occasions when he spoke of his early life in Bourne.

The breach with the rest of the "chaps" seems to have been pretty complete for a while. Autumn turned to Spring and Eli went about the country "looking at

things." The tunes were always going in his head during these days and when he shut his eyes the colours he saw were sometimes so bright that they startled him. He tried singing again one day, lying out in a wood full of blue bells. He liked the sound of some notes of his voice but his intonation was still a little uncertain, and he had a critical ear. He picked up an old fiddle somewhere but could never please himself with the music he drew from it; he was more successful with a "whistle pipe" he bought at Oldbury fair.

Then his wages were raised a little and he began to think of his clothes more than of old. He wore a blue tie on Sundays and spent both time and blacking on his best boots. Perhaps to display these adornments he went to chapel fairly regularly now, to the silent disgust of old John who looked down on "Methodys."

They sang a good deal in chapel, and Eli joined in. He was even referred to by some of the more sentimentally pious as "a brand plucked from the burning." Fortunately he did not know this or he would have shied off at once. As it was he was invited to sing a solo in a service of song to be performed at the chapel Anniversary, but Eli had hardly been plucked far enough for that. Though secretly flattered at being asked he refused, and Miss Evans, the daughter of the village shopkeeper, reasoned with him, for they were woefully short of singers in chapel that season. Miss Evans was very pious, played the harmonium, and wore side curls of a fashion long gone by, also she was thirty-five, and Eli shyly admired her and wondered what it would feel like to be in love and keep company with a person like that, and couldn't for the life of him imagine.

But even Miss Evans' entreaties failed. She played the tune of the solo over to him on the harmonium after service, a tune singularly reminiscent of the Christy Min-

strels (then very popular, though Eli had never heard of them). Throughout the number the chorus came in at intervals in a manner which might almost make you think, or rather, did make them think that they were "singing seconds" to the soloist.

"Surely you could sing that?" said Miss Evans.

"I could sing it fast enough," said Eli, brought to bay and desperate, "but 'twould make a cat sick to hear me and I baint a-going to make a fool of myself tryin'."

After which pretty speech he was covered with confusion and did not attend chapel for at least a month.

Then sheep-washing and hay-time came, and after that, harvest, so that his hands were pretty full, and after harvest old Towzer died and that seemed to upset John a good deal.

The autumn was cold and rainy, and the old shepherd began to cough but he went to his work as usual. One November night, as he finished winding up the clock, he turned to Eli.

"Hev 'ee tied up young Towzer?" he asked.

"Yes, Grandfer."

"An' locked the back door?"

"Yes, Grandfer."

"Well, don't 'ee forget as the money for my buryin' be unner the hearth stwon on the left han' side, fer I be gwine up ter bed now an' I shan't get up ner moor."

The old man was as good as his word. Within a week he was dead. Uncle Joseph and Aunt Emily came down for the funeral, and stayed for the state church-going that was obligatory on the Sunday following, the whole party, as custom directed, remaining seated throughout the service, holding black-bordered handkerchiefs tightly pressed to their chins, as though they had all cut themselves while shaving.

After taking what they wanted of the "bits of sticks,"

Emily and her husband sold the remainder. They gave Eli three pounds out of the proceeds, the young dog, and old Alice's prayer book and hymn book (the family Bible of course remained in the legitimate branch). Then Joseph and Emily his wife went back to Basingstoke and Eli saw them no more.

CHAPTER VI

MR. TALLIS

SO at the age of seventeen Eli was left alone in the world, and, as much as an employed man may be, his own master.

It was usual for unmarried labourers to live at the farms or to sleep in outbuildings and take their meals with the carters' families, but where Eli worked such accommodation was already occupied. The Browns would have taken him in, but their cottage was a small one and they could not make room for another inmate. A middle-aged couple called Symonds offered him bed and board for five shillings a week, and to their house he transferred his poor little belongings with the exception of his three pounds which he asked Anne Brown to "mind" for him.

The Symonds lived a little outside the village, close to the river, on a tract known as the marsh. Their cottage was held on a system of life tenure then common, one which offered all the disadvantages of "squatting" with those of landlordism thrown in. It was a ramshackle edifice and the tiled floor of the kitchen was laid down in direct contact with the peaty soil, so that in wet seasons, or when an extra amount of irrigation was applied to the adjacent meadows, water bubbled up between the squares, and Mrs. Symonds wore her pattens indoors as well as out. Fortunately she was a short woman, or the extra inches they gave to her stature would have brought her head in contact with the ceiling. The bedrooms, two in number, were little more than lofts divided each from

each by a low partition. There was no fireplace above stairs and the tiny windows were overhung by the thatch which was defective in many places.

The days when Eli lived there are long passed by, but such cottages still exist if anyone cares to search for them. The strange thing about them is that their inmates are often healthy folk enough and contrive to bring up large families fairly decently. I suppose it is because they are but little indoors. Eli himself never ailed when there.

Mrs. Symonds was not exactly a slattern, but she was very rough in her cooking and household methods, and her lodger missed the sweet order of his childhood's home. He missed also the companionship of his mental equals. Neither John nor Alice had been great talkers but there was marrow in what they did say. Mrs. Symonds chattered constantly at the top of her voice, and her husband joined in, but their talk never seemed to arrive anywhere; it circled vaguely from the weather to the 'taters, thence to a little feeble gossip, and so round again and *da capo*.

Since such conversation and the lack of books made winter evenings tedious, Eli was drawn to the public houses. This was no great improvement however. Both the Catherine Wheel and the Olive Branch were frequented by men very much his seniors, who looked upon him as a child, and since he was earning little more than boy's wage, he was neither able nor anxious to spend enough on beer to make him worthy of a publican's attention.

So about this time he began to save a little, only a few pence at a time, but after a while, and without having to apply to Anne, he was able to buy a much-battered bicycle of an early type. It was an iron-tyred "bone shaker" with wooden wheels which bucked like an unbroken cayuse at the rougher places on the always abominable roads. On this, when he had tamed it, he would

explore the countryside on Sunday afternoons and sometimes journey to distant inns on a work-day evening. Among strangers he found that his inches and grown-up appearance won him more consideration than he enjoyed nearer home. He could trust his voice again now and added to his tavern popularity by learning some new songs besides singing older ones such as "The Farmer's Bwoy" and "A Bunch o' Green Holly an' Ivy," songs which everyone knew and no one seemed to tire of hearing repeated.

He might have poached a little but that the tradition of meticulous honesty in which he had been reared forbade. Also he was a shepherd at heart as well as by profession and had no liking for unnecessary killings. Occasionally he would foregather with the "chaps" as of old. They had by this time got over their late fit of "owdaciousness" and contented themselves for a season with being no worse behaved than their world considered warranted by the nature of things.

Protected by such male society Eli would look shyly at the girls and even say "Hullo, Jane!" or "How be 'ee, Susan?" to old school fellows when they returned with netted hair and lengthened skirts, on holiday from their "places." They seemed greatly changed, these old play-fellows of his, sometimes unnaturally wise and at other times unaccountably silly. They interested him, but he was so silent in their company that they soon ceased to pay him any attention.

Indeed, though he did not often desire solitude now, he felt that a solitude was closing round him, and the long days he spent with no other company than his dog and his sheep and the wild things he loved to watch, were perhaps his least lonely hours.

He had lived thus for more than a year when he fell under influences which had a far-reaching effect upon

his life. The chapel at Bourne was not important enough to have a minister of its own. The circuit pastor from Oldbury came now and again when the claims of his congregations in the town and other places permitted, but the chapel stewards, plain, sensible working men, conducted the Bourne services on such occasions as a local preacher could not be present.

Eli had a poor opinion of local preachers. When they were elderly and prim their sermons bored him. When they were young and conceited he often found himself wondering why they were allowed to hold forth at all.

Young or old they dealt much with hell fire in a would-be forcible style, otherwise their discourses consisted of strings of texts and tags and anecdotes. They were mostly town-bred too, and the glibness of those among them who aspired to eloquence gave Eli a feeling of giddiness, much akin, I fancy, to the disturbance the æsthete of a rather later period was expected to feel at the sight of the colour magenta.

But one Sunday a new preacher appeared at chapel, who struck Eli as being very different from the rest. He was a Mr. Tallis, a watchmaker, who had lately come from Reading and had bought a little business in Oldbury, where a grandniece kept house for him.

He had adopted this child when her father died, and her mother had taken for second husband a certain Asa Jell, who in course of time had sunk from the position of foreman to a fashionable shoemaker to that of cobbler in his native village of Bourne.

Of course Eli knew the Jells, and had heard the preacher and his adopted daughter mentioned, but he had seen neither of them till the watchmaker came to preach at Bourne.

Mr. Tallis was elderly, indeed he was old, but he was not prim, and he did not talk about hell fire. He talked

about the love of God, and that as simply as a man might speak of the doings of every day. Indeed he used so few texts that some of the congregation were inclined to shake their heads and doubt if he really "preached the Gospel." Whether he did or no his sermons arrested Eli's attention. I hope I shall not be accused of flippancy if I say that during his choir boy days, when Eli thought of God at all, it was as a sort of Celestial Magistrate, a Super-Squire in fact; just, if exacting, sometimes kindly, but always a stickler for precedent and social and religious observances of the proper sort. Eli did not particularly rebel against this conception; it left him merely uninterested. Later on, when he went to chapel he did revolt at times against the doctrines set forth by the more dogmatic of the local preachers. He did not take them very seriously either, but he felt after a vague fashion that the God they presented for his worship was little better than a tyrant whose supernatural power and knowledge, though they made Him formidable, added nothing to His moral appeal.

At the bottom of his heart I do not think that the lad believed that anyone, either at church or chapel, could offer him more than a mass of guesswork and hearsay, founded, he supposed, upon the Bible, for which Eli had a merely traditional respect. He gave both denominations credit for doing their best, and did not doubt but that at both places of worship you would "hear some good," as his neighbours put it. To attend one or the other or both was customary, and to do so gave you a feeling of social solidarity if nothing more. In any case both were places where you could study your neighbours and think your own thoughts at leisure.

It is but from a word dropped now and again by Eli in his age that I have gathered the trend of his ideas at this time, and I can only indicate them after a perhaps

misleading fashion, for when I try to set down what I believe were his thoughts I find myself using phrases which would not have come naturally to him then.

One thing I think is certain. Preach you never so wisely, a man can only hear what he has ears to hear and when he is ready to hear it, and this is even more true of a boy.

Though in some ways Eli was young for his years, he had by this time reached an age when the emotions claim the whole of life for their province, and as I have said, Mr. Tallis preached the Love of God.

"Our Father" the preacher called Him and as spoken by the old watchmaker the familiar words took on a fuller meaning. Eli had never known a father, it was of old Alice he thought when he wished to picture to himself a protecting love. He wondered if it were possible that God could be in any way like her; as gentle, as watchful, as pitiful as she had been, immortal too, and hungering for the love of men such as Eli Buckle. The lad longed to believe that it was so.

The preacher taught that nothing was too small for God to heed, and that if we loved and trusted Him, He would intervene from on high to save us even from the result of our own actions. Intervene? Between us and what? Since God was All in All?

Eli shrank from the brink of that gulf, but his thoughts would not cease from pressing him. When you looked at things squarely what did you see? Much trouble for all God's creatures. If God were indeed the all wise and almighty Lover of the World, why should there be footrot among sheep for instance?

Eli was quite unaware that such questionings had troubled wiser men than he both before and since the days of Job, and he tried to put his doubts aside. Mr. Tallis spoke of faith, and perhaps that was the only way out of

the difficulty. Faith, it would appear, was the power of not thinking of things that stood contrary to what you hoped was true. Eli was innately honest of soul, but he was young and lonely, and beginning to be afraid of his own loneliness, so he tried hard to "have faith," and perhaps succeeded a little—for a while.

Like most English boys he was intensely reserved as to his inner life. He quietly informed himself as to the Sunday engagements of Mr. Tallis, and when possible, went to hear him preach, but he would never have approached him more nearly had not accident thrown him in the watchmaker's way.

CHAPTER VII

MARY

IT was by reason of some needlework done by the preacher's grandniece for her mother that Eli first had speech of Mr. Tallis. The mended garments were urgently needed to equip the ten-year-old Milly Jell for a "little place" at which the child was due on a certain Monday. The sewing was only finished on Saturday after the carrier had left Oldbury, and Mr. Tallis, who was to preach at Bourne that Sunday, offered to carry the parcel to the shoemaker's house. He arrived at chapel with the unwieldy package under his arm rather to the scandal of the more serious members of the congregation, and Mrs. Ambrey, a steward's wife, whispered to Miss Evans that "it didn't seem hardly the thing." No one could say that it was exactly wrong to carry a bundle on Sunday, still less could the ladies comment on the matter to Mr. Tallis himself, for, in spite of his "streaving ways," there was a dignity about the old man which forbade any such impertinence. It was on seeing Eli that Miss Evans be-thought her of a solution of the difficulty. Eli was only a "chap" and had no social or religious position to keep up, therefore after service it was suggested that he should accompany the preacher to the Jells' cottage and carry the offending object. All Bourne would be in the road at that hour, and "it would look better" the ladies thought.

Eli was amused at the little intrigue and at Mr. Tallis' entire unconsciousness of having done anything amiss. The latter accepted the service quite frankly as an act of

courtesy from a young man to an old one, and it served as the beginning of a friendship between them.

Before they parted Mr. Tallis had offered to lend Eli some books, and since it was now the slack time between haying and harvest and the young shepherd was enjoying a period of comparative leisure, he was glad to accept the loan. It was arranged that he should walk over to Oldbury the following Thursday and inspect the preacher's little library.

On Thursday therefore after tea Eli "cleaned himself" and set out on his three mile walk.

He chose the hill pathway which led through great fields of arable land. Harvest was late that year and the corn was not yet fully ripe. It gave the lad a curious pleasure to note the different movements and sounds made by the various crops as the wind passed over them; the hiss of the barley, the graceful flutter of the winter oats and the heavier swaying of the wheat as it bent with a wave-like motion above a world of little weeds and flowers clothing the soil beneath. The rye pleased him best. It was as tall as he, and watching the slender ears where a swell of the ground brought them between his eyes and the light, they seemed to him like a shoal of olive-coloured fish swimming in a luminous green sea.

It was half past seven when he reached Mr. Tallis' house in Oldbury High Street and entered the shop to find the old watchmaker with a lens in his eye stooping over his bench.

Mr. Tallis welcomed his guest with a smile, finished a bit of delicate work he was engaged upon, and then led Eli into a pleasant room at the back of the shop where a girl was sewing by the evening light. She rose to greet the visitor. She had a rather pale face and smooth dark hair, and Eli noticed that she paused a moment before speaking and looked at him with a little grave smile which

began with an arching of her eyebrows and ended with a tiny dimple at the corner of her mouth. She seemed to be about twenty years of age and was not exactly pretty, but she spoke very prettily, Eli thought, as she bade him "Good evening."

"This is my niece, Mary," said Mr. Tallis, and then began to talk to Eli about the object of his visit.

Together they went to the bookcase and the old man drew several volumes from the shelves. To the lad books were still rather strange subjects and a collection of about fifty of them seemed bewilderingly large. He opened one or two that Mr. Tallis put into his hands, reading the title pages through from beginning to end, and listening to his host's remarks with respectful attention. The books were mostly Bohn publications, cheap editions of standard works with distressingly small print in double columns. Seeing that Eli found it difficult to choose among them, Mr. Tallis came to the rescue by suggesting that he should begin on Motley's Dutch Republic, but Eli had picked up a little volume of Cowper's poems, which had opened at *The Poplar Grove*, and his eye fell on a line with a rhythm that at once took his fancy—"The whispering cool green colonnade," he read slowly to himself.

"I think I should like this if you don't mind," he said.

Mr. Tallis smiled.

"That belongs to Mary," he answered, "but I am sure she would be glad to lend it to you."

Hearing her name the girl moved towards them and looked over her uncle's shoulder.

"Yes, do take it," she said.

"And you can have the other too," added Mr. Tallis.

But Eli asked to be allowed to read the poetry book first and borrow another when that was finished.

It was getting dusk by this and Mary went out to fetch

the lamp. To the boy, accustomed to no brighter illumination than that of a tallow candle, she seemed on her return to have made the room quite radiant with light.

His host insisted on his staying on to "take a bit of supper," and he watched Mary lay the cloth and serve the simple little meal, bowing her head over her folded hands as her uncle said grace. Eli found himself talking quite at his ease as they sat at table. He wanted to see Mary smile again and achieved his object with a tale of his dog Towzer.

"Bring Towzer with you next time you come to see us," Mary said when he bade her "Good-night," and Eli flushed with pleasure at this invitation, given with such quiet friendliness.

Cowper proved rather a disappointment. Eli read the book religiously all through, but he found nothing he liked so well as the first sample. Mr. Tallis and Mary seemed pleased to see him when he returned the volume. This time he would not stay to supper, fearing to be burdensome to his new friends, but he took care to select a thin tome with large print for his next reading.

During his walk homeward his mind constantly turned towards the bright little room he had left. When he shut his eyes he could almost see the lamplight shining on Mary's dark plaits as it had done that first evening when she had bent her head for grace. Then a phrase floated into his brain, he could hardly tell why, for at first it did not seem to mean much.

"A still fire," he found himself saying over and over again, and each time he said it he seemed to see Mary Tallis more clearly.

The barley and oats were down now as he passed through the fields, the wheat would soon follow. He would be helping with the harvest and have a busier time till it was all garnered. After that he was to accompany

part of the flock to the Up Farm where the dry sheep would run the stubbles through the autumn and graze on the downlands during winter, while the head shepherd would remain with the lambing ewes at Bourne.

Eli was surprised at himself for finding the prospect dreary, for as a rule he rather liked his work on the hills. True he would have time for reading, but it would be difficult to change his books since Up Farm was nearly at the head of Ewebourne valley and quite seven miles from Oldbury. Of course he might borrow several books and as he finished each send it back by the carrier; it would only cost a few pence to do so, but still the idea was not an alluring one. Books were all very well, but . . . He felt restless and discontented when he thought of the coming winter, so with his accustomed philosophy, he mused upon that subject no more, but turned his thoughts to the past evening.

He only saw Mary Tallis once again before he left. She was with her mother at Bourne the night he went to Oldbury to ask for a supply of books for the winter, and he felt keenly disappointed, more so, indeed, than he thought reasonable. He took comfort in the fact that he would still have an opportunity to bid her good-bye, for Mr. Tallis was to preach at Bourne on the Sunday following, and Mary was to accompany him.

Spurred on by the example of an enthusiastic young cleric in the same deanery, and the entreaties of the "High Church" daughters of his Squire, Mr. Walker, had introduced the custom of holding a Harvest Festival in Bourne. Not to be outdone the chapel followed suit. The church was a good lap ahead, so to speak, for under judicious pressure from high places the farmers had consented to give their men a week-day half-holiday for the church celebration, or rather, they sent them to the service on that afternoon instead of to the

fields, and since the festivity ended up with a free tea in the school to the congregation only, not even the most ardent "chapeller" objected. The chapel Harvest Thanksgiving, being purely voluntary, had to take place on a Sunday, and the supporters thereof were obliged to content themselves with such tribute of corn and vegetable marrows as had not already been pre-empted by the Establishment.

In spite of this drawback, and on the principle that "anything is fun in the country" the majority of the younger church folk made a practice of encouraging schism, as Mrs. Walker phrased it, on this occasion.

The chapel therefore was crowded to the doorway and everyone "ploughed the fields and scattered" (out of the church hymn book by the way) till Miss Evans and the harmonium were hopelessly outdistanced in the race for the final Amen. (Bourne chapel, being Wesleyan, clung to various such little ecclesiastical trimmings discarded by more puritan conventicles).

Mary sat in the front pew, as befitted the preacher's niece, while Eli, as an unmarried chap, remained with his kind near the door, so he could see little of her except the back of her plain straw bonnet. It was rather an "old" bonnet for so young a girl, but its simplicity pleased Eli better than the cheap flowers and ribands with which more dashing spirits were beginning to astonish an elder and sterner generation.

The chapel windows were all tightly shut up and the atmosphere reeked of corduroy and hair oil and the disquieting odours of fading vegetation, reinforced later on by the smell of ill-snuffed candles and a little paraffin. All this, however, only added to the pleasurable, homey sort of feeling which pervaded the packed congregation. The little meeting-house had been built and was maintained by the difficult savings of the poor, and its organi-

sation and services harmonised with their social and religious ideals in a way that no merely inherited glories of venerable liturgy and stately architecture could ever rival.

Perhaps the stuffiness oppressed him, but whatever may have been the reason, Eli heard little of the sermon that evening. Two services each Sunday during the greater part of his childhood had left him with a slight, chronic deafness to exhortation from the pulpit. At the sound of a text his attention automatically shut itself off and it cost him an effort to begin to listen, even to Mr. Tallis. This time he managed to attend for a sentence or two, but his old friend having a set subject to preach on, appeared more constrained and conventional than was his wont. Eli was vaguely aware that the theme was the thankfulness they all ought to feel for—well, to put it badly—for the pains that Providence had taken to ensure the fertility of the fields round Bourne, whereas other districts had not been equally favoured that season.

He felt a little impatient.

After all, he thought, why should folks make so much more of a to-do about corn than about other things equally important? No one ever dreamed of holding a lambing festival in Spring and decorating the place with . . . sheep.

Boy-like, he began to laugh at his own fancy and then tried to be shocked at his flippancy. Of course he was thankful for the harvest, and he *would* listen to the sermon. At that moment Mary turned her head and he caught a glimpse of her profile. A big pumpkin lolled negligently on a window sill just above her. Suppose it fell down? It might nigh kill her. What foolishness to put such things there! Suppose he saw it beginning to roll? If he made a dash over the backs of the seats and the people, he might . . . Oh nonsense, it was safe

enough! He could see that. But if he had to jump? It would be rather fun, he thought, but it would be a silly adventure after all. Suppose now she were in a field and a bull attacked her? A quick rush of pleasure came over him at the thought, but . . . surely he did not wish Mary Tallis to be in danger? No. But if she were now? Then a memory of his early reading wafted back to him . . . the Princess Sabra . . . he saw her with smooth, dark plaits . . . and St. George . . . What would a dragon be like now, and would it be best to poke it in the mouth with your spear? Or how? Of course there had never been none such, not in England anyway, least of all in Bourne.

"Oh, drat it!" he said to himself, with an angry wriggle, "nothing *never* happens in Bourne."

Then the sermon ended and everyone came out into the autumn twilight where the air tasted sharp with a tang of wood smoke from some unextinguished bonfire and a star was shining over the top of Fairy Knoll where the trees stood dark above the white mist rising from the river.

Eli had promised himself that he would walk part of the way home with Mr. Tallis and Mary, but the latter was again staying with her mother, and Mr. Tallis was to sup with the Evans'. Everything turned out wrong and Eli drove his flock to the Up Farm next morning in none too amiable a temper.

CHAPTER VIII

WINTER AT THE UP FARM

THERE was a new head carter at the Up Farm with whom Eli was to lodge. He was a certain Tom Jarret, a small, sandy-grey man with no front teeth, who said little, and whose wife, a pale woman with dim eyes, said less, and was deaf to boot.

Eli, absorbed alternately in his work and his fits of restlessness, noted the pair but little at first.

If nothing ever happened in Bourne, still less might you look for adventure at the lonely Up Farm, and Eli, a young man like another, had need of some little clean danger for the good of his soul.

Young women may suffer a like hunger, for all I know, but that is beside my story. For boy or girl, however, in quiet inland places, far from wild mountains or the sea, such salt of life is hard to come by, at least, for the children of the poor.

In later years Eli and I have discussed this, and it was he who first made me realise what a drab ideal of life the most poetical and adventurous nation on earth has set before such of her youth as remain in their own country. For centuries we suppressed our heretics, and whipped and branded our vagrom men, and sent our tiresome younger sons as crusaders or emigrants and our poachers as convicts over sea. By economic, social, and religious pressure we have striven to discourage youthful initiative except along the narrowest lines.

Even a year or two ago the great mill of our State-

aided schools had most of its machinery set to the grinding out of hosts of cheap and therefore meek clerks. To them we said in a silence more imperative than any spoken words,—

“Sell us your soul for a Safe Job.”

To the factory hand and artisan we said,—

“We can only offer you a Job more or less precarious. You know what happens to the man who stands idle. Make yourself as efficient a machine as may be, and you will probably have bread to eat and some sort of a house to live in. What should you ask more?”

To the country labourer we have said,—

“Hush! Don’t talk! Don’t think! Live in your hovel and go on working for me. Nothing has happened, nothing is altered, nothing ever will be altered. You have always believed that, and you are right.”

What did it matter what we told them so long as they toiled steadily and hard, in order that we might say to ourselves,—

“Now we can get on with our Parliaments and our Churches and our Glorious Industrial Civilisation!”

Soon, I think, the labourers will begin to tell us things, perhaps things equally misleading.

But in the past, what answer have our youngsters, those at any rate, who were the best and the worst amongst them, made to our admonitions? They have never conformed to our ideas of the right and fitting. The indomitable spirit of the race has risen up to confound us, to be the terror of our timid minds in peace, and the safeguard of our bodies and estates in time of war.

Heretic, hero or hooligan, it is they who have kept the soul of England alive within her, and it is they, the disclassed from all classes, who have made for her that queerly built Empire upon every part of which they have set the imprint of their qualities and of their faults.

Eli, though perhaps he was already beginning to be tinged with heresy, was neither a hero nor a hooligan, and it had not yet occurred to him that man has a certain power over his environment, and, should it displease him, may generally either alter it or go elsewhere. He merely looked round for such distractions as lay ready to his hand, and found few indeed of any decent sort, for I suppose the time of Eli's boyhood was the very dullest period the country has known. The old village wakes and fairs were by then nearly all abolished. They had not been very respectable festivals, and the greater and lesser powers in country places had combined to put them down, but had not felt called upon to provide any substitute.

In spite of the frowns of the highly-placed, here and there traces of these ancient fairs yet lingered on, pale ghosts of former revels.

On the traditional day on some "green" or in a meadow near a public house, you might still light upon swings and a shabby roundabout, and groups of people drifting in and out of a drinking booth, near whose entrance were set up the stalls of a few itinerant pedlars. At night a naphtha lamp or two might flare into the darkness, and round these the children of the place would cluster, hoping in vain that something really amusing would shortly happen.

Everyone else, except perhaps a few loving couples, would wander about drearily, conscious that they ought to be enjoying themselves and somehow were not doing so, thereafter finding a sullen consolation in beer.

Once cudgel-play, called back-swording, and shin-kicking and grinning through a horse-collar had been features of these gatherings, but such rough sports were now either dead or fast dying out. Old professors of these arts were still living though, as Eli, to his advantage, discovered.

He had not been long at the farm ere he learnt that

Tom Jarret had been a noted backswordsman in his day, and would be willing, nay, delighted to take his young lodger as a pupil.

Eli became apt enough at the game after a while, but he bought his proficiency with pretty severe knocks, for Tom hit hard and his only idea of a joke was to make someone "zmart," otherwise, as far as could be seen, he was a kindly soul enough.

Tom and Eli held their contests in the big barn where part of the floor had been laid down with hard chalk pug for threshing. Only once did Mrs. Jarret appear on the scene when backswarding was going on. It was during Eli's second lesson that her shadow fell across the big door set open to admit the light. It caused Eli to look away from his opponent who instantly fetched him a thwack on the head which drew even more than the regulation "inch o' blood" that salutes the winner of a bout.

Eli heard the deaf woman give a harsh cry, next moment she was standing between him and her husband.

"Don't 'ee, Tom! Don't hit the boy! Oh, cayn't ye men *iver* lave each other alone?" she was saying in her dry, half-whispering tones.

Eli nodded and smiled to reassure her.

"It's all right, Mrs. Jarret," he said, bending towards her and speaking loudly, "I'll have to take to vinegar drinking if I bleed for a scratch the like o' this."

He looked across at Jarret whose toothless mouth was set in an apologetic sort of grin, but his eyes were watching his wife and they were not smiling at all.

"You goo in, Zarah," he said, but not loudly. His wife heard him, as she nearly always did when he spoke directly to her.

She wavered a moment, then with a little gesture of her hands, tragic in its helplessness, she turned and left them.

Eli noted her more after this, and there was something about her he could not understand. He would at times see her sewing fall upon her lap and her face slowly stiffen, then, if she should look up and her eyes met his, she would rise and go away. He would not have heeded it much only that he became aware that at such times Tom was watching her too, and with some anxiety, as Eli thought.

He supposed she might be ill and in pain on these occasions and asked her once when they were alone, and he saw the change coming over her face. She seemed a little startled but relieved for the moment.

"I be quite well, thank ye," she said, "yis, quite well, thankee all the same."

He found her sometimes looking at him in a wondering kind of way after that.

He considered once or twice if he should leave Tom to give an eye to the sheep and ask for a few hours off in order to visit Oldbury, but an accident to his ancient bicycle left him more tied to the Up Farm than before. At last he paid the visit, to find Mr. Tallis at home but anxious and preoccupied, since Mary was in bed with a "quinsey sore throat." Eli had news of her later from the carrier who passed within a mile. She was better but weakly, and had gone to friends at Reading for a bit o' change. She might be away some time, and a cousin was keeping house for Mr. Tallis till she should return.

Eli surprised Tom Jarret by the fierceness of his stick-fighting that night and for some days afterwards; so much so that on Christmas Eve the professor began to make serious calculations.

"Ter morrer's Christmas," he said, "an' New Year's next week, an' Wakefield Veast be at Candelmas. 'Tain't whut 'twas but mebbe Jim Brock cud vind some lad or 'nuther ter put up against 'ee. Danged if 'ee shaynt fight

a' Wakefield Veast if so be as a' can. Wakefield volk think as no one knows naught 'cept theirselves. Mebbe I cud win a quart o' beer backin' 'ee, fer ye be a likely lad wi' a long rache to 'ee. Aye, mebbe I'd win as much as a gallon if 'ee der goo arn as 'ee be a-goin' now."

That evening, after tea, Eli visited his flock, saw that all was well with them and then started on one of his lonely prowls.

He left the farm below him and climbing by a green drift-road was soon walking through the dusk and quiet of the high downs. It was colder there and the ground was covered with a thin powdering of snow.

One great shoulder of hill was lit by a rising moon; eastward, another stood dark against the sky. Junipers showed as little pillars of blackness upon the turf which crisped beneath his feet.

He stood for a moment to listen and through the silence heard that the air was full of the faintest tinkling; sounds on the extreme verge of perception, a noise as of millions and millions of rime crystals falling from the blades of grass as the frost sharpened with the advance of night.

He turned again uphill, moving so lightly that he hardly felt the earth, and then he found that he was laughing silently, and knew himself companioned.

It seemed to him that all about was a crowding and a going of little feet, as if there went with him, unseen and unheard, a myriad small laughers, each one as happy as he.

At the summit the invisible rout swept on and past him, going swiftly over the hill, leaving him standing with arms outstretched, thrilling with the soft delicious laughter that had made never a sound.

So he stood and gazed over a dim world lying beneath and around him till up from those gulfs of night came floating the first of the Christmas chimes.

From Ellingsworth, from Dalbury, from distant Ewebourne Vale, from all the little villages hidden in the folds of the lower downs, one after another the belfrys sent their music flying. To Eli on his hill, the vibrations seemed to rise and pass him, to break overhead, like bubbles in the pure, cold air.

The bell music still lingered in his ears and the laughter in his heart when he reached the Jarrets' door.

A light within traced the shadows of geranium leaves sharply upon the curtains of the kitchen window. As he entered Mrs. Jarret was sitting alone. She did not hear or see him and as Eli came round the table he saw that her face was like a stone mask of Fear. Quite still she sat in the light of the candle which flickered in the draught, her hands upon her knees, some dark sewing lying on the floor at her feet. He made a quick step towards her and spoke her name. She rose, struggling to compose her features, then moved to the window, parted the curtains and pretended to look out. She steadied herself with one hand upon the sill, and Eli heard a flower pot chatter in its saucer where her knuckles touched it. He went to her and laid his hand on her shoulder. At his touch she turned slowly and looked straight into his eyes.

"Oh-h-h!" she said, on a deep breath, as of one released from some long-drawn-out physical pain. Then bending her grey head she leant her forehead for a moment against his arm. When she raised it her face was still as pale as that of a dead woman, but the horror had faded from her eyes. "Oh, your coat smells good," she said, "thyme and juniper an' vrost an' the clean air."

She paused, and her eyes caught a bunch of leaves that Eli had stuck in his hat.

"Will 'ee gi' me your posy?" she asked, and her lips curved into the ghost of a smile.

He put it into her hand.

"I can sleep now," she said.

She lit another candle from the one on the table, and taking that in her hand, fastened the door and went upstairs, bidding him good-night.

Neither of them ever spoke of the matter again, but Eli noticed that she did not now avoid his glance when she was fighting down one of her strange seizures; rather, her eyes would seek him out and follow his movements, as if the sight of him helped her. He grew quick to notice the first signs of her distress and would speak to her or distract her attention in some other way, and now and again as he did so, would surprise an oddly wistful look on Tom's unbeautiful visage.

Only once did Sarah Jarret refer in any way to her trouble, whatever it might be.

An unseasonable thunderstorm came on one evening, and Eli went to the window to watch the lightning. When he returned she looked up from her sewing.

"You baint froughtened o' thunder," she said.

Eli smiled and shook his head.

"No more baint you, an' no more baint I. There's no un froughtened o' thunder here," Tom interposed gruffly.

Sarah fixed her strained-looking eyes upon her husband's face.

"No," she said, "I baint froughtened o' thunder, nor o' lightning neither. I can't never call to mind bein' froughtened o' things that kills quick like that."

She took up her sewing once more, and at the silence even Eli, in all the confidence of his youthful health and strength, felt for a moment a little creeping shiver of fear.

As though he had spoken Sarah raised her eyes to his. They seemed to implore him, and he, divining her dumb need, answered her look with a steady glance and a smile.

Day by day as Candlemas approached, Tom Jarret nursed his pupil and cast about for a backwording youth to pit him against. At one time he had hopes that a certain Bill Hutchin might accept the challenge, but shortly before Candlemas day that young man was appointed under keeper to Mr. Savery of Millard House, who owned most of Wakefield parish, and Mr. Savery was known to be "strict."

So Bill was out of the question and Eli's "vight" never took place. Tom Jarret had, however, set his obstinate mind on attending the Feast, and acting on a hint from Sarah, Eli accompanied him to the classic scene of festivity. Together they hung round the cocoa-nut shy and a barn where one or two partially drunk couples, aided by a wholly drunk fiddler, were attempting to perform some kind of a dance. The wind was biting, and Tom soon took refuge in the bar of the Raven, the most disreputable but one of the eight public houses in the tiny town. Here Tom spent long hours in drinking himself savagely drunk and in railing with others of his sort against the tyranny of their betters and the general decadence of the times. Eli wandered in and out, he bought a mug as a fairing for Mrs. Jarret, and looked a little wistfully at the ribands and brooches and other feminine adornments on the pedlars' stalls. One or two slatternly women and girls accosted him, but he hardly looked at them, and in truth they were not attractive. He was depressed and was also becoming a little anxious as to how to deal with Tom.

At last closing time arrived and the carter and his fellow toppers were cast forth upon a dark world where drifts of sleety rain stung their faces as they reeled homewards. The five miles to the Up Farm was an arduous journey for Eli. Jarret yearned to fight something, he cared not what, sign-post or milestone, or Eli himself, and it was

three in the morning before the young shepherd threw himself, tired out, upon his bed.

Next morning Tom arose bearing upon him no sign of the orgy of the night before, except it were an added touch of sullenness in his demeanour. Sarah followed him with her eyes as he went off to work, then she herself moved to the door and looked forth.

"Spring be a-comin'," she said to Eli, "I can smell it in the air. You'll be countin' the days now till you gets back to Bourne."

Eli looked at her, startled at her reading of his unconscious thought. She smiled and her face took on almost a look of youth.

"Do 'ee think as I don't know?" she said, and taking the tray of crockery used at breakfast, went out.

In truth Eli counted the days, and watching the approach of Spring, grew more restless with the lengthening light.

When April was all but past and it was time for him to leave, and Towzer was keeping the flock bunched in the farmyard, Eli went into the house to say good-bye to Sarah.

She looked up from her wash tub, for it was Monday morning, then wiped her hands and came towards him.

"Good-bye, young Eli, an' luck go wi' 'ee," she said.

Eli hesitated a moment, then spoke a little shyly.

"I hope you'll be better, Mrs. Jarret."

"Better," she said, and pondered a moment. "Aye, I'm better, and anyway I can help meself now."

Towzer barked impatiently, and Eli turned to go.

Sarah followed him into the garden and broke a sprig of rosemary from a bush by the door.

"See, 'twill strike if you set it in a pot," she said, and smiled. "'Tis a plant to bring lover's luck wi' a young 'ooman, I once heard tell. You med take it from an old

one fer you've adone more good here than you knaws on."

So Eli with her gift stuck in his hat, and his heart light within him, left the Up Farm and the days of his boyhood behind him.

III: THE NESTING SEASON

III: THE NESTING SEASON

CHAPTER IX

LOVE

IT was May and the valley was flooded with sunshine. I am no impartial judge, but to me it seems that the Spring light washes the meadows and uplands, the hawthorn hedges and wooded crests round Ewebourne Vale with a peculiar radiance. It is as though gold were dissolved in the air and all things seen through that medium.

The sheep were down from the hills and feeding greedily amid the grass and flowers of such water-meadows as were not "up for hay."

Eli walked among his flock singing as he went, Towzer at his heels, quiet but watching his master with steady eyes, ready to spring forward and bark at the slightest signal. The lad was shifting hurdles, working with the ease of long habit and the grace of a well-made body in its earliest prime. The pastures were laced with runnels of moving water, slews and ditches fed from the main river that rippled along one edge of the grassland and under a wooded bank known as Jannaways Copse, and so round the curve of the hill to the distant town.

Eli set up his hurdles and drove in the stakes, making all fast with bands of twisted withy, then he and the dog turned the sheep into the new pen, leaving a square of nibbled meadow behind them. This done, he laid his cloak and wallet in the shade of the trees where the foot-

path crossed the river by a turf bridge. Setting Towzer to guard them and the sheep, the shepherd betook himself to a pool hard by to watch the trout and grayling basking in the shallows or flitting, shadowy, through the hatches which controlled the flow of the stream.

The undergrowth of the copse had been partly felled that winter, and across the river he could see that the ground beneath the trees was covered with primroses and windflowers, while in the shadier parts the rich, sweet colour of bluebells was beginning to tinge the greenery springing from the soil. Near by, the branches of a wild cherry, laden with blossom, showed white against the firs on a distant hill, and the wind was fragrant of the sap and aromatic juices of a hundred growing and flowering things, hastening to unfold their buds to the air.

Eli lay on the grass and peered into the pool. Tunes chased one another through his brain, the stream sang them to him as it raced under the hatch, but just beneath him the water was still enough for him to see the pebbles and weed at the bottom. Then a grayling stole up in the shadow of the bank, so near that he could count the spines of the great back fin as it wavered in the current. A filmy-winged fly touched the surface, and looking at that he found the depths vanished, or again, he could lose both and see the reflection of the grass and ladysmocks on the brink and his own face looking through them with the sky for background. He amused himself with these varied pictures, altering the focus of his vision to suit first one and then another, but when it came to the turn of the reflections once more, some machinery within him seemed, as it were, to give a little catch and then go on. Another face was looking at him from the water beside his own—a round face, freckled, but very pink and white between the freckles, shadowed by a sunbonnet and framed in bands of tawny hair, a face with greenish eyes and lips

that easily fell apart and showed the teeth. They did so now as a laugh sounded behind him.

Like most shepherds Eli was a quiet mover. He did not start, but turned his head and smiled at the girl standing behind him.

"Hullo, Eli," she said, and laughed again.

"Hullo, Polly," Eli replied, and then silence fell between them and they looked at one another.

She was a buxom, country girl, this Polly, good enough to look at, with her youth and bright colour, in spite of the hint of slackened fibre that a keen eye might have gathered from her face and form. Eli had known her long, but had at no time held much speech with her. Her parents were drifters of a class more common now than fifty years ago, though well known even then. "Michael-massers," Ewebourne folk call them, families that never seem to settle down, the man contracting himself to some farmer at the annual hiring fairs in the towns but seldom renewing the contract with the same master. In October you meet them in the country lanes plodding beside carts piled with their furniture and younger offspring. They make few friends, and their children are the despair of school teachers. They certainly save no money, generally they hoard grievances instead. The "old families" among the willagers, the settled people, well known and respected in their hamlets, have but little intercourse with these birds of passage.

Polly and Eli had been schoolmates for a brief season, then she moved on, grew older, went into service, changing from farm to farm with inherited restlessness, or working in the less reputable inns, with frequent periods of unemployment, "learning no good anywhere" as Anne Brown and her friends phrased it. Now the family were back in Bourne for a while, and Polly "out of a place" was with them, and on the look out for amusement,

amusement combined if possible with profits however small, though to do her justice they were as yet a secondary consideration. Parading up and down the village with a girl crony of an evening and on Sunday afternoons, she had marked Eli immediately on his return. She saw that he was tall and young and personable, and learned that he had no one to spend his wages upon but himself. True, he had never seemed to take much notice of her, but in spite, or even perhaps a little because of that she found she would like to pick ladysmocks near Jannaway's Copse that afternoon in May.

She was the first to break the silence.

"Ooh! it's a frog!" she exclaimed, shying violently sideways after the manner of a cart colt.

"Most like," he said, and rolled over luxuriously on the young herbage. Polly gathered up her gaily-patterned if somewhat faded skirts and sat down by his side.

"I be mortal 'feared o' frogs," she said, and paused. "But there, I don't suppose you'd care if I was to drop dead wi' fright."

Eli felt that this was a move in some recognised gambit, but as he did not know the expected counter he remained silent. It was a pleasant enough interlude in his solitary day to have this other young thing to speak to and sit beside. He did not expect the interview to result in much conversation, but her mere coming was a mild adventure. She was almost a stranger, and a member of that strange genus girl, also she was taking rather special heed of him, which, as far as he knew, no strange girl had done before.

She was looking at him now from under her sunbonnet, nibbling the strings the while. She moved, and though she did not touch him the wind brought to him the warmth of her body. She was young and fresh, full of life and of the primitive arts of her kind. Eli's pulse quickened

a beat or two, the Spring air fanned him and the sun shone over all.

"So you be a shepherd now," she said at last.

Eli nodded.

"Mucky trade." She lifted and wrinkled her nose as she spoke.

"Why?" he queried, genuinely surprised.

"Oh, I dunno, but 'tis."

There was another pause, longer this time. Then she took off her sunbonnet impatiently and swung it by the strings.

"Beastly old bonnet! I hate it!" she said crossly.

Eli could deal with this.

"I think it's a nice one enough," he answered.

"Nice enough for me?"

"Nice enough for . . . for the Queen of Proosia herself," said Eli, invoking Royalty with random gallantry.

"Jacky Blake—you know—Clubby Jack o' the Five Bells—he wanted fer to buy me a hat wi' roses on it last Oldbury Fair. I dunno what he was addling at, a blackavised monkey like him."

She smiled consciously.

"Did you ever offer to buy a girl a fairin', Eli? Not you, I'll warr'nt. I don't believe as how you could say 'Boo' to a goose, so there!"

"Boo," said Eli with schoolboy promptitude.

Polly replied by snatching his hat. He caught her wrist and held it, very careful not to hurt her. She tried to pull it away, and a little scuffle resulted; then she ducked under his arm, and before he could prevent her, ran half way across the beam of the hatch and stood there, holding her trophy over the water.

"What'll 'ee gie I not ter fling it in?" she cried.

"I'll gie 'ee what fer, if 'ee do," Eli called back, laughing in his turn, and made a start towards her.

She dropped the hat into the stream and fled through the knee-high blossoms, uttering little shrieks of affected terror.

Eli gave chase. His eyes were shining. This wild thing, that ran from him, that allured and defied him, must be caught, must be tamed. Every pulse in his body drummed him on to the hunt. Polly was not built for speed; in half a dozen strides he overtook her. She swerved, her head over her shoulder to watch him, she never marked a half dried ditch among the long grass and shrieked in earnest as she sank to mid leg in the rich, black mud. Perhaps she would have sunk further if Eli had not been at hand, at any rate she chose to think so and clung to him after her rescue, out of breath and half inclined to cry.

"Lard, that did gie I a turn! I'd 'a sunk if it hadn't been fer you, Eli, that I 'ood. Oh, I be that frough-tened!" and she clung to him afresh.

He felt himself of importance as he drank in the heady wine of her flattery, and comforted her in a lordly way, trying to make light of her danger without too greatly belittling his own part in her deliverance. His arm was round her by this and she nestled against him, looking up into his eyes, then with a kitten-like turn of her head, she rubbed her cheek against his.

Eli caught his breath and stood still. A tide was rising in him and the ground seemed to sway a little under his feet. Then he became aware that the vague restlessness that had come upon him so often was grown to a vast hunger, a need; there was some great lack in the world that had seemed so full of delight. The creature in his arms was . . . what was she?

A voice was speaking near him; he must collect himself, he must understand its utterance.

"Oh, look at the muck on my shoes and stockings, and

my gingham gown!" the voice was saying piteously. "What be I to do with 'em, Eli?"

He stared at her a moment, then answered quietly,

"Come and wash them at the hatch."

There was scarcely a hint of emotion in his voice, but he held Polly by the hand as he went back.

The tide within him was still rising, he was floating upon it, the shores were being submerged and transformed, old landmarks of his childhood and his solitary boyhood were growing hazy, vanishing. The grass and hills were about him as before, but they seemed as unsubstantial as a half remembered dream. Mechanically he stopped a moment to rescue his hat, caught in the bars of the hatch.

"I be sorry I throwed it in," Polly said penitently.

Eli smiled at her, half closing his eyes under their thick lashes with the childish trick old Alice had loved so well, but he did not answer.

"I be glad the hay-making baint begun as yet," she went on, "I'd be ashamed for the neighbours to see me in this pickle."

Polly regarded her feet coyly and held out her mud stained gown, then she half turned away, whipped off her shoes and stockings, and stretching out a foot, splashed the water and drew back.

"It's cold," she said. "Why, I ain't been in paddling since I was at school."

Clutching her skirts, she stepped from the bank and stood balancing herself unsteadily in the pebbly bed of the stream.

How rosy white her feet and ankles shewed against the blue and green and brown of the water! She moved up river and the ripples banked and broke into cool silver against her flesh. Then she turned and looked over her

shoulder at Eli once more, and her eyes were burning with a strange fire.

The tide was high in him by now and from beneath the tide something was stirring, rising up into the sunlight, something enormous and strong with the primal force of all ages; a power outside him yet part of himself, whose energy, brutish and divine, filled every cell of his being and swept him, soul and body together, into the whirlpool of a life transcending his.

The girl saw that the power was upon him, judged it to be her own power, triumphed—and went too far.

What was it? Brought up among country folk as Eli had been, it would have needed more than her coarse jest alone to startle him so profoundly. Was it the lax droop of the mouth, the hint of a lascivious gesture? Who shall say? Perhaps it was no more than the lash back of the boy's own being against this thing that threatened to enslave his reticent soul.

The effect was a strange one. For a moment he vanished from his own consciousness and saw nothing but this girl, saw her, not as the lure and symbol of the great Nature Power, the god but now made manifest to him in his own flesh, saw her not even as she then was, a foolish soul in an undisciplined body caught in the same enchanted net as himself, but rather as what I believe the years did make of her. Stripped of the glamour of her youth, she stood before Eli the type and image of that cold and dingy thing, a woman trafficking with dulled senses and for sordid ends in what should have been the splendour and mystery of her sex.

Youth can be stern and hard, and when deeply moved, as deeply unjust. It was upon Polly that Eli visited the emotions she had raised in him, and the sick loathing with which his vision filled him.

He stood up straight upon the bank.

"Come out of that!" he said roughly, and as the girl gazed at him in amazement, he flung out his arm with an imperative gesture. "Come out of that, I tell you! Pick up your things and go home!"

More than once in his life this mood came upon Eli as a storm wind rises on a summer day, and when it came, others obeyed him as the waves obey that wind, nor, till it was over, did they stay to wonder why.

As though she were an automaton the girl came out of the river, her eyes held by his. She caught up her shoes and stockings, hesitated a moment, then made off barefoot over the grass towards the path that led to the village. Once or twice she looked back, to see Eli standing immovable, waiting till she should be gone. She reached the stile, sat down on the step, hurriedly resumed her foot gear, and slipping between the posts, turned along the dusty highway and vanished from his sight.

As she disappeared Eli gave a little shiver and looked around him. The world was real again, the sky was blue, the sunlight golden, the cherry boughs were as white as before, but the stream of his being yet swirled with the eddies of that flood which had ebbed in him as quickly as it had arisen.

He felt ashamed, angered, defeated, he knew not why.

The crying of his sheep came to him from the fold, and as if in answer, once more the hunger of his heart rose and cried within him, insistently cried out and clamoured, for what unimaginable good, against what unreal fetters, he could not tell.

He leaped a runnel and crossed the bridge where Tower rose to welcome him with a quick wagging of his stumpy tail. Bidding the dog lie still, Eli went further into the wood and threw himself down amid the primroses by the path, and there he spent a bitter and bewildered

hour. Slowly the turmoil within him abated, but the hunger it had aroused was not allayed.

And then he heard Towzer bark again, and looking up, suddenly he knew past doubting, once and for all, what it was for which his heart had cried.

Mary Tallis was coming towards him through the wood. The shadows of the young leaves patterned the pale buff of her cotton gown and of the straw hat crossed with a dark riband which she wore knotted under her chin. On her arm hung a basket of primroses, and in her hand she held a bunch of Herb Paris. She paused a moment as she saw Eli, and he lay quiet with held breath, drinking in that sight, as a soul new-risen from earth might drink of the waters of Paradise.

Through good and evil and long years of seeming forgetfulness, I believe something of that image lay hidden in his heart till the day he died.

As she drew near he rose to his feet and stood aside in silence to let her pass.

Mary looked in his face a moment and perhaps read something there, but I doubt if she guessed how nearly what was written concerned her. With a few quiet words of greeting and one of her grave smiles, she went on her way homewards to the town, and Eli stood in Jannaway's Copse alone.

He stood there for a long while. When he moved it was to go down among the underbrush and search for Herb Paris. Not in every wood or in every part of this wood is that strange plant found. When he at last discovered a tuft, and fastened three or four of its green quatrefoils in his jacket, it was to him as though he had registered a vow.

The sun was low by this, and the downs of the southern ridge were blue against the sky. Eli called his dog and together they busied themselves about the sheep. Then,

work over for the day, the old instinct took him, and instead of seeking his lodging, with the wondering Towzer behind him, he breasted the slopes of Fairy Knoll, threaded the fir clump on the summit, where the gnarled stems glowed in the sunset, and facing easterly, went hillwards to meet the night.

The stars were shining and all the thrush songs ended when the pair turned back towards Bourne. Along the hedges the campion flowers were glimmering ghostly white. Down in the valley where the snipe were bleating, a trail of mist hung like a scarf athwart the stream.

As Eli crossed the bridge the village was asleep and every cottage in darkness except one, in which a single window still showed through its dimity curtains a gleam of orange light. The warmth of that little square shining under the thatch eaves caught at the young shepherd's heart with a mingling of memory and hope, but he only lingered a moment, for he had practical matters to attend to, and passed on to his own dwelling. Within doors he groped for the wooden box where Mrs. Symonds kept her store of matches, and lit a candle. He fed Towzer and chained him in the yard, ate a piece of bread and cheese left ready for him, and creeping softly to his attic, slept till dawn.

CHAPTER X

KEEPING COMPANY

ELI henceforth had a purpose and clung to it with silent tenacity, but it was no easy path on which he had set out.

Poverty and the lack of houses often make it difficult for a labourer to marry even when man and maid are of the same mind and both of them of the careless type that enters into wedlock with little thought of the future.

Eli, however, was doubtful indeed of his power to bring Mary to the same mind as himself. As Mr. Tallis' niece she could look higher. True, her relationship to the drunken cobbler might do something to redress the social balance, but Eli, with a natural chivalry, found no pleasure in that thought. Nevertheless he took some pains to cultivate his acquaintance with the Jell family, and became a favourite with Mary's mother and the children, and the patient, if bored confidant of the cobbler's many grievances.

Contrasting most of the cottages he knew with Mr. Tallis' home, Eli at times felt that the very wish to marry Mary and bring her to live in Bourne as the wife of a shepherd was an unforgiveably selfish one, and then his spirit would rise in a bitterness new to him, against the conditions of his life.

Here, as in other matters, he asked himself the old, old questions, and found no answers, since he now hesitated to accept the premises upon which all the answers he had heard or could imagine, were based.

Why should the owners of the land that fed the sheep be rich, and the owners of the sheep themselves live in comfort, while the shepherds, the men upon whose fidelity and skill all profit from the flocks depended, must work hard and live poorly all their days, and watch their wives go meanly clad, and curtsy to their betters? Eli knew the quality of all three classes in his neighbourhood and saw clearly enough that it was neither brains nor industry that made the difference between them.

Years before the Chartist Riots had been put down, not without bloodshed. The middle classes had won their political opportunities and had been forced, in their turn, to fling various sops to the discontented proletariat of the towns in order to keep them more or less quiet for the time. Only the country labourer, with the lack of cohesion and organisation that his circumstances and traditions imposed upon him, was left hopeless, sullen, or careless as the case might be. He had no choice but to try and make the best of such systems as his political superiors might see fit to devise, possibly for his benefit, but primarily, of course, for their own.

Eli knew little of the history of his times, but he was aware that among the elder men echoes of the ancient thunders rumbled on. He remembered words let drop by Tom Jarret and his like when in their cups at Wakefield Feast and elsewhere. Nor did he forget the face of a neighbour who had come suddenly upon a newly erected gate and a board warning trespassers from a footpath through woods not far from the village.

"Damn 'un! They'd shut the very sky away from we if they cud," the man had growled to himself, but Eli had heard and seen. He was, however, a practical youth, and the dreams and instincts inherent in his nature were not of the kind that lead inevitably to revolutionary action.

The world was as it was, and many evil things seemed

beyond his power to alter. The cards he found in his hand were the cards he must win with if he was to win at all. It was only now and again that he troubled to think why they should have been dealt to him, and he did not then care to connect the question of the dealer with the subject of the discourses of Mr. Tallis.

I fancy that there lies in the minds of many of our peasants an unformulated belief in a "Necessity behind the Gods," a feeling that they and the beneficent and certainly powerful deity to whom they pray, are both there to make the best of things by mutual good will and co-operation against the evil of the world. It is perhaps a bracing conception.

There were two ideas that emerged clearly from the welter of Eli's thoughts and emotions at this time.

Somehow he must make Mary love him.

Somehow he must give her a home not too utterly comfortable to be tolerable to a girl brought up as she had been.

Saving might be thought to be impossible on the wages of an under-shepherd then, even taking Michaelmas money and allowances into consideration, but by some means Eli contrived to save. He did odd jobs in his overtime. Sometimes he would thrash out leasing corn, or the tiny crops garnered by the few small holders left in Bourne. He made hurdles in his dinner hour, or executed rough repairs at night, for he was always handy with tools. He kept bees in Symonds' garden, and a few chickens in the yard, and he bought a pig of his own. The two latter enterprises were things entirely forbidden by most farmers to the labourers in their employ, but Eli's master knew an honest man when he saw one and made no objection. After long deliberation, and although the weekly contributions trenched greatly on his earnings, he joined the new County Benefit Society, which was slowly super-

seding the bankrupt Sharing Out Clubs that had swallowed so much of the savings of the neighbourhood. Still he did not allow these multifarious activities to interfere with his main trade, and the head shepherd thought well of him.

All this gave him little time for reading, but he regretted that less when he discovered that in her heart Mary had no great love of books for their own sakes. Left to herself she would have found that her Bible and hymn book sufficed her, with perhaps occasional extracts from some pious periodical. Mr. Tallis, by his conversation and influence, tried to broaden her mental horizon, and since she loved and respected her uncle, she strove to profit by his instruction, I fancy with but mediocre success. The old watchmaker was a good, if rather slow talker, and Eli listened well, so Mr. Tallis hardly noted, or only with pleasure, that his young disciple had dropped into a habit of visiting him every Wednesday night when work permitted.

The ostensible reason was a Bible class which Mr. Tallis held in his own house on that evening from half past seven to half past eight o'clock. Eli was not consciously a hypocrite; young lovers seldom are, for they feel a real enthusiasm for any pursuit that throws them into the society of the beloved, but I think it can hardly be doubted that if Mr. Tallis had lectured on law or logarithms Eli would have been nearly as regular in his attendance. The classes themselves, however, both repelled and attracted him; attracted him by reason of the personal charm and obvious sincerity of the teacher and the beauty and pathetic appeal of the subjects he dealt with, repelled him by a certain lack of actuality and depth that he sensed rather than detected, in the philosophy offered for his acceptance. Whatever may be thought of the spiritual food thus set before him, it was certainly not Eli's ap-

pointed meat, and in trying to force himself to assimilate it, doubtless he did his soul a wrong.

He would watch Mary during the classes, her brown eyes intent, a faint colour in her usually pale cheeks, drinking in every word or reverently looking out references in her Bible, and envy her a little, while wondering that she found heavenly manna in what to him seemed but "light bread." The very thought brought with it a tang of bitterness and division, only healed when their voices blended in the tune of a final hymn.

Things went so well with Eli that by Michaelmas, after he had purchased some necessary clothing, he was able to hand over to Anne Brown sufficient to bring his savings up to five pounds ten shillings. At first he was elated, it seemed a triumph of economy, and then he was proportionately cast down. At this rate would it ever be possible to get a home together? Two pounds ten! It represented much labour and time and self-denial, and what would it buy? Even of second-hand plenishings of the cheapest sort, so very little.

He was to stay at Bourne for the lambing that year, but during those three months he saw nothing of Mary. When he resumed his Wednesday visits another anxiety attacked him. A young local preacher began to appear at the class, to ask obviously "intelligent" questions, and under pretext of discussing the lesson, to show off his glib tongue and Bible knowledge for the admiration of the other students and, as Eli felt convinced, particularly of Mary. He wore a black coat, this young man, and an intricately folded tie of quite fashionable shape and material, had a habit of sleeking his hair at odd moments, served in a shop, and was, Eli considered, entirely odious. But it was perilously possible that a girl might not think so. People said you never could tell what would please a

woman, but then Mary wasn't just a woman. Mary was—Mary.

Mr. Tallis was dealing with some of the historical books of the Old Testament that session, and Eli resolved to make a tremendous effort and assert himself. He borrowed a Commentary, bought a whole pound of "dip" candles and fairly "swatted" (there is no other word) at Deborah and Saul, and Jonathan and the Kings of Israel and Judah, and spoke so eloquently about them all in class that even Mr. Tallis was impressed with his erudition, while the sleek-haired preacher was eclipsed.

After which, to use for once the phraseology of Mary's favourite magazines, "Satan seeing his opportunity, spread a subtle net in which to entangle the feet of our young shepherd."

One evening when the class was over, Mr. Tallis was tired and fell asleep in his chair, leaving Mary and Eli to entertain each other. She had put the books away and was smoothing the table cover when she broke a silence that had fallen between them.

"Eli," she said, "I thought you spoke up very well to-night. Uncle has been noticing what good answers you've been making this last week or two." She paused and looked down. "Speaking—'tis a gift, he says, and he thinks you're blessed with it."

Eli thought a moment.

"Did your uncle say that to you?" he asked.

"Yes, and I think 'tis true. Didn't you notice how attentive they all was when you were telling about Rehoboam to-night?"

Eli had noted it very well, but he said nothing.

Mary twined her fingers together, trying to pluck up courage to continue.

"I believe you could be a preacher. Uncle said you could read up and get, a scholarship, I think he called it

so, that you could be kept at college or some such place and study for the ministry, but anyway you could begin by being a local preacher."

Eli still did not answer and her voice took a note of pleading.

"Don't you think you could? 'Tis but right that those to whom the Lord has given the power should testify to His goodness. Oh, Eli, I should be so glad, so proud, if I could see you leading souls to God . . . and . . . and . . . I am sure you could speak well."

Eli's heart glowed within him at her words and what they might imply. "Speak well?" But he knew he could. He could wield the jargon as well as another, he could hold the people spell-bound by his words, and Mary would be proud of him . . . and then . . .

With one of his sudden intuitions he knew that his life and his wooing would run smoothly if he became a preacher. Why should he not consent? He wished, he meant, he believed he was going to answer "Yes," and what he found himself saying was "No."

"I couldn't do that, Mary, my dear," he replied, and never noticed that he had called her "dear" for the first time.

"Why?" she said faintly.

"Because there's two things I got to tell the truth about it if I lie about everything else. Do 'ee know what they be? Well, one's God, and the other's you."

"Oh, Eli," she exclaimed aghast.

"Listen," he said. "I believe I could study fast enough, and I know I could preach. I could make them listen to me, aye, have 'em all gaping after me like a nest of young thrushes, if I chose. But I'd have to tell 'em what they wanted to hear, an' dress it up the way they likes, which is what they means by the Gospel and the Truth. But that I won't do, for I'm not sure that their Gospel is my

Gospel, or their Truth any truth at all for the matter o' that. And about God, my dear, whether He is or whether He isn't what folks say, I can't testify till I know, know of my own knowledge, and not because I read it in a book or someone told me."

He was speaking from some inner depth of himself hitherto unexplored, but he knew he was telling the utter truth as far as he found it. Not often is such power given to a man, but when that spring bursts forth in him the waters bring strange healing to the heart from which they flow, even when that heart, as was Eli's then, is suffering sharp pain or the fear of it.

"But, Eli, you believe the Bible, don't you?" Mary asked, and her voice trembled a little as she spoke.

He hesitated a moment.

"Maybe," he answered. "I think I do, and I hope so, but I don't know, and if you and me is to be anything to each other, you must never ask me to say more about such things than I can say. Oh, Mary," he cried, and in his grief the old talk of his childhood came back to his lips, "I've told 'ee the truth, and I doubt I've a-finished any chance I might 'a had wi' 'ee, but I had to tell 'ee, I had to!"

She was silent, looking down.

"Be 'ee angry, Mary?" he questioned at last.

"Angry? No, why should I be angry because you've told me the truth?" she answered, but she looked troubled.

"'Tis only that . . . I . . . I don't understand."

"You understands one thing well enough, my dear."

He spoke half whimsically, but his voice fell like music for all that.

She glanced up and the look in his eyes held hers. In her way she was as truthful as he. She made no pretence of coyness or mistake, only she flushed and after-

wards went pale as she looked at him, then with a little sigh she bent her head and gave him her answer.

"Yes," she said softly. "I understand."

.

But it was not all plain sailing after that.

Mr. Tallis looked disturbed, and sniffed a good deal, as was his way when anything upset him. Mrs. Jell merely wept over her daughter whenever they met, but an Aunt wrote a letter whose receipt gave Mary bad nights and red eyelids. Altogether things were very uncomfortable for the lovers, who were obliged to contrive meetings free from the disapproving glances of their elders.

Matters brightened a little at the next Michaelmas, for Eli's master, finding sheep profitable, decided to add to his stock and to keep a large flock permanently at the Up Farm and a smaller one at Bourne. Eli, with a rise of wages, was to have charge of the latter, and if he gave satisfaction, would, as the flock increased, be raised to the status of head shepherd. This, and the determined attitude taken up by the young people caused their elders officially to recognise the fact that they were "keeping company," on condition that the lovers should consent to "wait," what for and how long was not mentioned in the pact.

Then, after all, Eli's master decided to put the smaller flock at the Up Farm for the winter, and there Eli took up work as before. The Jarrets had left by this and gone nearer to Wakefield, and Eli only saw them once. The new carter was a bachelor and he and the shepherd "did for themselves" with occasional help from a labourer's wife. The winter was a somewhat dreary one for Eli since letters were neither delivered nor collected at the Up Farm, and his duties kept him much with the sheep.

So the engagement continued till Michaelmas came round once more.

By this time Eli's little hoard was doubled, and Mary, by taking in needlework and teaching a backward child his letters, had been able to buy a little house then. Next year Eli would be twenty-one and a head shepherd, and then . . . surely then . . .

He went about his work singing.

But shortly before Eli gained his promotion Mr. Tallis died. He left Mary his furniture and twenty pounds, and though she and Eli sincerely mourned the kind old man, yet his bequest made it possible for the wedding to take place as soon as Eli's master could find a house for him. The Bourne flock amounted to nearly three hundred now, and Eli was to take over the duties of head shepherd to the farm in the valley.

Meanwhile Mary stored her furniture and took up her abode with her mother for a while, for Mrs. Jell was expecting yet another baby, and was much out of health.

CHAPTER XI

THE WEDDING

ELI and Mary were married on the first of July. Early in the morning the bridegroom went out and tended his sheep, for even on his wedding-day a countryman's task must be done, and in all his working life Eli had never taken a full week-day holiday. The Saturday "afternoon off" is for the town dweller and the artisan, not for the peasant, but for all that, and mainly because his work is varied and interesting, this constant toil does not make the agricultural "Jack" such a "dull boy" as the townsman is apt to imagine.

Of all this, much is shortly to be changed, for unless I mistake my comrades of the New Armies, will not go back to the old conditions of labour.

However, to my tale.

Eli left Hollis, his underling, with full instructions, and went to the Copse Cottage to give a last look round. He and Mary had worked hard and happily to line their nest. The little house, set against a background of fir and chestnut, made a pretty picture with the roses and green shoots of the winter jasmine rambling up to the thatch. Eli had put up a little porch of larch poles over the door facing the road, and the gardener at Wintershot Park, who was a friend of his, had promised him slips of a choice creeper to clothe it.

The living room, which was also the kitchen, looked very cosy as he opened the door. Already there were pot plants on the sill of the low south window, framed

in by curtains and a top frill of lilac cotton. By the hearth stood an oak settle with a patchwork cushion, and against the walls were set two or three "wheel back" Windsor chairs, and a beautiful though battered specimen of Chippendale pattern, a discard from some fashionable house, bought for a few shillings at a farm sale. A square of coarse matting and a new Kidderminster rug of harsh, bright colouring, lay upon the tiled floor. The table, with its chequered cloth, was set out as if "for company," that is to say, the tall lamp, an unusual luxury in a country cottage then, stood in the centre, while Alice's prayer book and hymn book, and two or three Sunday school prizes of Mary's winning, were disposed around it in a kind of star pattern. Mr. Tallis' little library found a home on some shelves between the dresser and a hanging cupboard of dark elm wood which filled a corner.

Through the open scullery door might be caught a glimpse of scoured brass and shining pewter, a green-necked pitcher and blue and yellow basins, with black cooking-pots ranged above a sink of grey stone, for it was a well-appointed cottage according to the standards of the time.

Eli laid the fire in the open grate and went out with the big kettle to fill it at the well in the back yard, where the windlass and buckets stood under a pent-house together with Towzer's barrel and chain.

The bridegroom began his toilet by sluicing himself down with cold water at the sink, finishing off in the bedroom above, then having left everything in order, he locked up, and putting the key of the front door in his pocket, set out for the church.

Great events, like marriages and burials, not to speak of such smaller ones as Good Friday services and national commemorations, were never celebrated in country chapels then, nor is it usual for them to be so now.

Wintershot Woodlands lie on the high ground above Bourne village but in another parish, and together with Eli's new home, formed part of the estate of Sir John Holt, a local magnate of the old school, who inhabited a big square house some two miles nearer Bishop's Old-bury.

Owing to its lonely situation the Copse Cottage was not in much request among the working folk; not that their predilections would have weighed much with the autocratic old Squire who, as a rule, set his face against labourers living anywhere but in the houses that were let with the farms of their employers. It was as a special favour that he had consented to allow Eli's master to have the house for his head shepherd, and that only with many conditions and warnings as to the discipline to be enforced upon Towzer. According to Sir John, cottagers other than head shepherds had no right to keep a dog at all.

Everything about him seemed dreamy and unreal to Eli as he went along the road to Bourne. It was one of those still days of summer when all the distances show pearly tinted under a soft grey sky. The elm trees in the valley had already discarded their livery of vivid green and stood out as dark and massive shapes against the slopes of arable land and distant woods beyond.

Half way down the hill Eli was aware of a sound of whistling and found his best man awaiting him, seated on a gate and wearing his Sunday suit decked off with a white satin favour and a flowery buttonhole.

This youth, the blacksmith's apprentice, Alfred Jackson by name, was a cheerful soul, and in spite of various difficulties which he already foresaw, intended to do his best to make the approaching festivity a success. He divined at once that it would be useless to spend conversational efforts on Eli just then, so merely continued his whistling

till they reached the church. It was already nearly eleven and they had not long to wait.

By the combined efforts of Anne Brown, 'Ria Reynolds and his wife, Jell had been kept quite passably sober so far. He was to give Mary away and arrived first with her on his arm. The elder women had stayed at the house to finish the preparations for the wedding dinner, so the little procession consisted chiefly of young Browns and Jells of various sizes, the elder ones also adorned with favours, to the envy of a rabble of less privileged infants that hung about the church door.

Mary was attended by a serious but elegant young woman from Oldbury, who played the part of bridesmaid, and was expected to pair off with Alf Jackson for the rest of the day.

Alf did his valiant best to entertain her, but from Anne Brown's description, I believe he found her rather heavy in hand. Anne told me that the bride wore grey alpaca and a newer-fashioned bonnet than ordinary, and that it did not become her, "she being one of the sort as never pays for dressin'," by which I was intended to understand that, given Mary's opportunity, Anne considered that she herself could have cut a far better dash.

Alf Jackson was a little awkward about tendering the marriage fee; it seemed to him difficult to administer anything of the nature of a tip to the quality, but he and Eli managed it somehow. Service ended, the wedding party returned to the cobbler's house, leaving the clerk to get Mr. Walker out of his surplice which he wore very short and full, and (since the reverend gentleman was not one to *soigner* his ecclesiastical *dessous*) with a considerable length of black trouser leg shewing beneath the hem.

Then, the guests having all arrived at the house, the interminable festivities began.

First, parsnip wine was ceremonially drunk by all pres-

ent except Eli and Mary and the bridesmaid, who, in the language of Anne, "were temperance." In country places this was still considered an eccentric thing to be.

Then came dinner—cold beef and cold bacon, and baked potatoes and bread and cheese, and plum duff, washed down by beer drawn from a small cask in the back kitchen. During the earlier part of the feast everyone was fairly cheerful, but before it ended Mr. Jell was beginning to get rather out of hand, and Anne Brown's blockade of the back kitchen became less effective every moment.

Mr. Jell was understood to be of the opinion that a man who couldn't be a bit merry at his own wedding was scarcely to be considered a man. He advised Eli to look at him, Mr. Jell, and take warning; also to put his foot down from the first, if he wanted to call his soul his own. He was alternately rising to such heights of metaphor and innuendo, and falling to such depths of pathos that the cordon was hurriedly withdrawn and Mr. Jell allowed to depart to the back kitchen, it was hoped for good.

Then the tables were cleared and everyone drew their chairs back against the wall and sat upon them in depressed silence. After a while the best man came to the rescue with a paper bag full of bulls-eyes which he handed round with a courtly air. This created a mild diversion during which the company affected not to notice that Amos and 'Ria and Mrs. Symonds had one by one slipped unostentatiously into the back kitchen in their turn.

Anne didn't care a bit. She could entirely trust her Amos, and knew that in all essentials he would act as a good husband and father should. If "once in a blue moon he liked to get a skinful of drink as didn't cost him nothing, why shouldn't he? 'Twas different with that there old Jell."

Then the eldest Master Brown produced apples from nowhere, and distributed them with a blushing modesty suited to his years. They were quite unripe, but no one liked to refuse the kindly little lad; the younger members of the Jell family even hailed them with enthusiasm.

The result was that the bride's mother had to hand the baby somewhat hurriedly to the bride in order to take the youngest Jell but two into the back garden, owing to his sudden indisposition. Whereupon the invaluable Alfred offered to tell a story.

"The night was very dark and cold," he began in sepulchral tones, "the wind was 'owling in the chimbleys, and we was all sitting round the old iron pot when 'Erbert 'e began to tell a story, an' this was the story as 'e told: 'The night was very dark and cold, the wind was 'owling in the chimbleys, an' we was all sitting round the old iron pot . . .'"

When he got thus far Anne saw the jest and laughed, and when for the third time they were "all sitting round the old iron pot," everyone was laughing except Mr. Jell, who had returned from the back kitchen in no condition to unravel problems, but being deeply impressed by the narrator's mock solemnity, very persistent in demanding detailed explanations.

Mary was quite haggard by this time, and Eli desperate. He got up from his seat and proposed that they should all go for a walk. The suggestion was well received, but this too had to be done ceremonially. First went the bride and bridegroom, arm in arm, then the best man and the bridesmaid, similarly linked, then Master Brown and Miss Milly Jell, feeling that they ought to follow suit but too shy to essay such a grown-up procedure. Others of the youngsters skirmished round in open order, and so they paraded the village and some of the nearer hamlets till it was time to return for tea, and

then, as in the best man's story, everything began all over again.

At half past seven Anne Brown swept up her weary but reluctant little flock, and departed to her cottage, which stood about three quarters of a mile from Eli's new abode. Amos remained behind, and some two hours afterwards had just been persuaded to sing a song, under cover of which Eli and Mary slipped away and walked homeward through the fragrant dusk.

A light was shining from the cottage as they drew near, for Anne, having put her younger children to bed, had gone up to the Copse with her elder son and daughter in order to have everything ready for the newly-wedded pair.

The children were on the watch, and at the click of the garden gate, the kitchen door was thrown open, and as Mary crossed her threshold, she was greeted with a shower of rose petals thrown by their friendly young hands.

She stooped to kiss them, and then, the good-nights said, the young couple were at last alone.

Mary took off her bonnet with a sigh of relief as she sank upon the settle near the hearth, where a little fire of sticks was crackling, "jest fer company" as Anne had said. Eli placed himself beside her, and so in silence but great content, they remained a long, sweet while.

At last, the clock striking eleven roused them from their reverie.

"'Tis late, my dear," Mary said, rising shyly from her seat. Then she hesitated a moment. "Will you read a portion or shall I?"

"You read," he answered, but I do not think either of them heeded the verses greatly.

When she had finished and closed the book, she looked up at her husband.

"'Tis for you to pray, Eli, in your own house," she said.

He was seated at the table, and his grandmother's prayer book lay by his hand. He looked at it a moment, then drew it nearer. It opened of itself at the last page of the Order of Evening Prayer.

"Lighten our darkness," he read in his grave young voice, and so to the end of the beautiful collect, and Mary bowed her head to listen to that music till she joined him in the final Amen.

A little wind rose just before dawn, and set a spray of roses knocking at the window pane, and as at a signal, Mary awoke. A movement told her that her husband was also waking.

"What is it, Eli?" she said softly, and stretching out her hand to touch his cheek, found it wet with tears.

With a passionate movement he flung his arms round her.

"Oh Mary, my dear, my dear," he whispered, "you won't never know how lonely I've a-been!"

She drew his head down against her shoulder, hushing him like a child, and so clasping each other, they fell asleep once more.

CHAPTER XII

WINTERSHOT WOODLANDS

"Summer that was so fair and is so sweet
Goes from us slowly on unwilling feet,
Singing she goes, but through her song I hear
A cold wind rustling the grasses sere."

—AFTER MITSUNE.

THE wedding festivities had been offered up by Eli as a sacrifice to conventionality and the feelings of his friends.

To please themselves the bride and bridegroom had planned a little wedding excursion of half a day during the slack time between haying and harvest.

They had arranged to hire a pony and trap and drive up the Valley to Wakefield to see an old friend of Mary who had moved there from Oldbury. They were to stop on the return journey to take tea with the Jarrets at Easterham Inglis, but the visit was never paid.

News came that Tom Jarret was dead. He had laid down his life in performing one of those acts of matter-of-course heroism which men, women, and even children of all races and countries seem ready to undertake when opportunity offers.

These deeds seldom bring any glory to their doers. If there is any record kept of them (beyond the angelic one in which we were taught to believe by Sterne and other religious writers of a former day) it is generally tucked away in some corner of a newspaper to give fuller space for reports of somebody's talk.

Tom Jarret's little adventure was a very simple one. He was coming out of his cottage in the narrow Easterham High Street as a team of masterless horses dashed down the hill into the village, dragging an empty waggon behind them. Fifty yards away the children were pouring out of school, and Tom Jarret stood between.

I doubt if it ever occurred to him to hesitate, well as he knew the difficulty and danger of the task he undertook.

The old backswordsman's eye and strength and agility did not fail him, both children and horses were saved, but Tom never recovered his injuries, and died within a week.

The Squire at Sarah's old home, away beyond the downs, heard of the circumstances of her widowhood, and made a little interest to obtain her a place in an almshouse in his neighbourhood, and there, I believe, she ended her days.

It was at the close of September that Mary received her first visit from "the quality." Lady Holt was generally described as "quite a character," or "a regular caution," according to the status of those privileged to make her acquaintance. I knew a scapegrace grandnephew of hers when we were both at Oxford (I met him again a while ago on the Caribou Road in British Columbia, where he was ostler at a Stopping House).

He used to relate family legends in which "Aunt Eliza" figured, and Amos and Anne Brown have supplemented these from another point of view.

Lady Holt made a point of visiting all the cottages on the estate and was particular to enquire into the morals of any newcomers. She drove up to the Woodlands in a big yellow barouche, which, with its pair of fat horses, nearly blocked the narrow road. The footman jumped off the box and opened the garden gate, but he went no

further, being well trained in the etiquette laid down by his mistress for cottage visiting.

"Get out, Powell, and give me your arm," said the Squiress to a sort of maid of honour who accompanied her, a nervous-looking, greyish person, holding a vague social position midway between housekeeper and companion.

Lady Holt was quite an active woman when she chose, but at times she felt that it added to her dignity to assume semi-invalid airs, and it was one of the difficulties of Powell's always rather difficult existence to judge when she should, and when she should not proffer assistance.

Miss Powell, according to Anne, was always dressed in black silk and wore a mantle "wi' squiggly black braid most all over it, an' a frazzly sort of black bonnit wi' a feather. Sort o' bun shaped bonnit, it was, an' looked as if it couldn't never 'a stopped on 'er 'ead, 'er 'air bein' that thin and scrouged back."

"But it did, I warr'nt. Th' old gal 'ood 'a dealt wi' she proper if't had so much as gone askew," was Amos' comment on this description.

From the same authorities I learnt that Lady Holt wore "a black cashmeared gown an' an old black jackut, from one year's end to another, an' a mushroom 'at tied unner 'er chin wi' a veil, an' dimon' rings on 'er 'ands, an' allus carried grey kid gloves an' a handkercher like a cobweb for fineness. One o' the gals up at the 'ouse said as 'ow she give near five shillin' apiece fer 'em, an' her never 'ood knock at a cottage door but walked right in like a tax c'llector."

I do not know where the Browns gained their information as to the brusque manners of tax collectors, for one would not have imagined that they had much to do with such officials.

Anne was in the kitchen with Mary on the occasion of

Lady Holt's visit, and was an amused spectator of the whole scene.

The caller did open the door without knocking, and having relinquished Powell's arm, stood, a black and imposing figure, on the threshold. Anne dropped the regulation bob curtsey as Mary, laying down her sewing, rose to her feet.

"Buckle," said her ladyship, in her booming contralto tones, "were you married respectably?"

Mary was so taken aback that she was silent, and merely gazed at her visitor in amazement. At last she spoke.

"Won't you come in, Madam?" she said.

"Me lady," amended Miss Powell from the doorstep, with a meaning glance over her patroness's shoulder.

Lady Holt stared hard at the younger woman, but Mary's eyes did not waver, nor her air of gentle dignity abate, and then, because after all the Squires *was* a lady, and a brave woman to boot, she recognised something in "Buckle" that won her immediate respect.

"Thank you," she said quite civilly, and took the chair her hostess offered her.

The lady-in-waiting followed in a self-effacing manner, and Anne accommodated her with a seat in the background.

Lady Holt looked round the kitchen, taking in everything with a practised and comprehensive glance.

"You keep it all very nice and tidy, I see," she said approvingly.

Mary smiled. She was beginning rather to like this authoritative old dame.

"My husband and I thought it kind of you and Sir John to let us have the place," she answered.

"Sir John and your ladyship," murmured Powell, but on a lower note this time, since all appeared to be going

on smoothly, and with her ladyship it was generally wisest to let well and sometimes ill alone.

Lady Holt's glance had strayed to Mary's work basket.

"Let me see your sewing," she said. "I hope you are fond of needlework."

"Yes, my lady," Mary replied, unprompted this time. It was obviously the right form of address and she used it quite simply.

She rose and gave her work into the questioner's hands. It was a baby's little shirt.

Lady Holt looked up into the seamstress's face.

"That's right, my dear," she said, and actually patted the young wife's hand. Mary understood her and flushed with shy pleasure.

Powell and Anne could hardly believe their ears and eyes, and the Squiress was evidently a little surprised at herself.

"I hope your husband . . ." she began, rather more on her first note, but she looked at Mary again and changed her sentence. "I hope you will both be very happy," she said firmly, and rising, went towards the door. On the step she turned as if she had forgotten something. "I am told you are a dissenter. Is that true?" she asked severely.

"Yes," said Mary steadily.

This time though Powell's lips mechanically framed the honorific, they made no sound, and even Anne held her breath.

"Well, anyhow, I'll tell the keeper to send you some rabbits," was Lady Holt's utterly unexpected answer, and she marched down the garden and got herself unaided into the barouche.

"A very nice, respectable young woman, that," she announced as they drove away, and Powell answered,

"Yes, me lady," as she would have done had Lady Holt stated that Mary was a negro princess in disguise.

All the same I do not believe that she was very much afraid of "her ladyship." Except perhaps, a few of the children, no one was, though many people pretended to tremble before her, and the tradesmen of Oldbury grovelled at her carriage steps. I think they all recognised the Squire and his wife for just exactly what they were, a pair of obstinate, honourable, kindly, unconscionable old busybodies, with a deep sense of their own importance, and the keenest possible interest in the doings of their immediate neighbours.

Sir John, for instance, made no bones at all at reining up his horse if he saw a child carrying a parcel, and demanding with a sceptre-like wave of his hunting crop to have the contents exhibited for his inspection. He and his consort distributed patronage and rabbits to the labourers on the estate, patronage and pheasants to the farmers, pheasants and slightly more veiled patronage to the clergy and smaller gentlefolk, and except upon county business, did not see too much of their fellow magnates who could not be patronised and had plenty of game of their own. However, since the family had owned and lived at Wintershot Park for many generations, they and their people liked and understood each other very well.

It was quite another matter when Sir Timothy Hoskins, the son of a cotton king, who had bought Attiwell Towers, tried to imitate the Holtian methods. Everyone, especially Sir John and his Dame, considered Sir Timothy's conduct not only objectionable, but entirely absurd.

To Eli the idea of parenthood came as a shock. Sometimes he thought he was glad, if for no other reason than because of his tender loyalty towards Mary. He was always apt to think of the child merely as Mary's baby, and reproached himself for so doing. But his heart sank

a little at times; things were so well, so very well, as they stood. He desired no change.

He had wandered long in the desert, and had struggled so hard to find this oasis and make for himself a little walled paradise therein, and now a disturbing factor was soon to make its appearance; for the good of everyone concerned, no doubt, but a disturbance none the less. For all his twenty-two years (he was twenty-two now) and his responsible work and grave ways, down in the depth of him Eli cherished the joy of being a little "Mary's baby" himself, and was jealous of the prerogative. He began to study small children and their ways. They were funny and pretty certainly. If his child were a boy it would be pleasant as he grew older to take him about and show him things, and if it were a girl . . . Eli admired nice little girls, but they seemed slightly outside his scheme of life somehow.

His scheme of life! But what was his scheme of life? He looked at Amos Brown of an evening among his troop of children, and wondered how it must feel to be the sole bread-winner for such a family, to provide food for all those hungry mouths, and boots for all those restless little feet. He knew how much Amos and Anne were to each other, and they were never alone together. Never.

Then as the months went on, and he saw Mary's look of physical well being and perfect mental poise altering, and thought of what was to come, he would experience hot fits of revolt, almost of anger.

"Why could not things have stayed as they were?" he asked himself, and then like an echo, came the thought that they would, in a sense, always stay as they were. He would tend sheep every day until he died. Mary would probably sew more little clothes and wash more little faces, and toil and contrive till she grew old, and he grew old, and they would all go round in the same ever-

lasting mill as their forefathers had done, and as their children would do, when he and Mary lay by John and Alice in the earth. And what was the good of it all?

Surely there was some reason to make it all worth while. But if so—what? Meanwhile, if there were no honest answer to that question, was not the world wide—wide? A man and a woman might perhaps go forth into it together, and find adventure and delight, and the unknown.

Then he would feel ashamed of himself and think very humbly of how differently Mary looked at life. With her woman's wisdom she seemed to find everything worth while, and to move in a windless atmosphere of still content.

And yet? Looking at her sometimes as she sewed, he would surprise an expression in her eyes that left him wondering, and more troubled than before.

Almost unconsciously he tried to adapt himself, at least as far as externals went, to Mary's ideas of what was right and fitting.

He attended chapel regularly because she liked him to do so, even when she could not manage the long walk herself, but he did not speak to her of his "long thoughts" as he let the prayers and discourses drift over him. A shepherd has many quiet hours on a week day too, and it was not only in chapel that Eli did his thinking. To Mary's sorrow her husband would never "pray extempore" for her edification. After that first night when he had read one short collect from his grandmother's book, it was the wife who offered up the evening worship. This troubled her a little. But Eli read the Bible to her when she wished, and they sang hymns together on Sundays. He sang them for their tunes, to Mary it was the words that mattered.

His work went well too, and the flock thrived. In

January, when lambing began and Eli must be much from home, both by night and day, it was arranged with the Browns that Nancy, their eldest girl, should come and stay at the Copse Cottage to keep Mary company. Mrs. Jell was stronger but she could not leave home, and Milly had gone back to service. The next three on the Jell string were boys, and therefore considered quite useless to anyone from the point of view of companionship.

Mrs. Brown was rather inclined to sniff at the idea of Mary needing anyone with her at that period.

"Lard bless my soul," said Anne, "when she've a-had as many children as me, her 'ont make such a fuss about a baby more or less. Her can have 'Ria Reynolds when her time comes, an' that baint till April, an' the doctor be only four mile away if anything do go real amiss. Not that I thinks much o' *he*. He'll never be the man his vether were. The old gentleman was summut like a doctor, leastwise when 'ee wer'nt in drink."

"Ah," said Amos, "my mother's old missus up to Piggott's Varm allus used ter zay as how her'd rather hev old Dr. Hastings drunk nor ne're another un sober. Mother's told I that this many a time. But let Nancy goo, Mary'll like ut, an' 'twill be a bit o' change fer the little gal. Her can goo ter zchool all the same."

So Nancy went to the Woodlands, and the days drew on to the latter part of February.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NIGHT IN THE SHEEPFOLD

"The Dragon King's daughter sat weeping in her Palace under the sea, but the tide that night was no higher than usual."

—FROM THE BOOK OF WEN YEN.

MARY was sitting alone in the cottage, the lamp lit, an elm log glowing dully on the hearth among a scatter of white ashes. A kettle hung by a chain over the embers, and a basin covered by a saucer stood near by, in order that the contents might keep warm, for Eli had not yet come in to his supper and the hour was late.

Across one end of the table a white cloth was laid, and on it stood tea things and a plate, half a loaf of bread, a piece of hard red cheese, and a couple of uncooked onions in a blue rimmed saucer.

On the other end of the table Mary was leaning, her hands thrown out before her. She had been trying to read one of the prize books of her youth, now she had pushed it away and was listening, but there was nothing to hear.

Outside, the world lay blind and dumb, wrapped in white frost-fog and utterly still.

The fire burned noiselessly, only the big clock ticked with a steady beat that served but to give a tenseness to the silence.

Some white garments folded in a pile, stood on the Chippendale chair beneath the corner cupboard in the further angle of the room.

There was a drawn look about Mary's face, especially round the corners of her mouth. To anyone who knew her well it would have been strange to see her on a week day with her hands lying idle, but so she remained, motionless, till with a whirr of weights and chains the clock made ready to strike eleven. At the sound she half rose, than sank listlessly back into her place, and folding her arms upon the table, let her head drop upon them with a faint sigh.

Almost as she did so she heard steps upon the road and the click of the garden gate. She raised herself anew and moved to meet Eli as he opened the door.

He looked tired, and tiny drops clung to his eyebrows and hair, and silvered all his clothing. A breath of fog followed him out of the night and vanished in the warmer air of the kitchen.

"I'm sorry to be so late, Mary," he said. "Why did you wait up, my dear? I could ha' got my own supper."

He had taken off his thick coat and was about to hang it behind the door, but she took it from him and put it to the fire. Still she did not speak.

He was thinking of the flock he had left penned on the further slope of the hill and did not notice her silence.

She threw a few sticks on the fire and when the water boiled in the kettle she made the tea, and taking the basin from the hearth, served him with a mess of bread and milk. He was hungry and eat without speaking, while she sat and watched him. Once or twice she seemed about to break the silence, and at last she did so.

"Nancy had a bit of an accident this afternoon," she said. Her voice had a tone of fatigue.

Eli looked up quickly.

"'Tisn't much, I believe," she continued, "only a bit of a sprained ankle. She went in to see her mother, I

fancy, on her way from school, and it must have happened then. Anne's keeping her for the night."

"Have you been down to Anne's?" Eli asked. He had not yet realised what Nancy's accident would mean to Mary. She saw that and felt a momentary soreness at his lack of understanding, but she answered quite gently,

"No, I haven't been there. Anne sent little John and Tilly up with a message as far as I can make out, but I'd gone down to Spraggett's to get a bit of sugar, for I was out of it. 'Twas dark when I got in, for I had to rest twice coming up Wintershot Hill."

Eli laid his hand on hers for a moment in a quiet gesture of sympathy and then went on with his supper.

"The children must have found the house shut up and got tired of waiting. I found this set against the door."

She took a piece of board from the hearth and showed it to Eli. Upon it a message was scrawled in chalk:

"Nancy is stopped home," it ran, "her foot is twist Mother says tell you shes not very bad john and tilley."

Eli smiled at the enterprise shown by the Brown twins in delivering their message. Still he did not seem to realise the position, and Mary wondered at him. She thought rather bitterly that she would say nothing, but let him go back to his sheep while she faced the night alone. It was not easy for Eli, accustomed to long hours of solitude both by day and night, to realise how the darkness might weigh upon his wife, left alone in the unneighbourled cottage. She had never seemed nervous and her conscience and her love for Eli had imposed upon her a self-control that it was becoming beyond her power to sustain.

I think that ever since her early childhood she had been trying to live at a mental and spiritual level above what was natural to her, and both the repression and the strain

were, in local parlance, "coming back upon her" now. But for a little longer she still held on.

Supper over, the young shepherd moved to the fire as if to take up his coat, but paused a moment to warm himself.

"I've had a bit o' bad luck myself," he said, staring into the embers. "I've lost one yow already to-night, an' I doubt if we'll save more'n one of her lambs. Doubles, she had. An' there's another fourter yow I don't half like the look on, an' . . ."

He checked himself as he heard Mary catch her breath, and looking up, was distressed to see the pallor of her face.

"Oh, Eli, the poor beasts too," she said, and her lips were quivering. "And all for our faults. *They* never tasted of the fruit of the tree," she added, half to herself.

For a moment he did not catch her meaning, and when he did, and before he could answer, she was weeping in his arms.

"Oh, Eli," she sobbed, "must you go?"

He sat down on the settle and drew her close. This break-down seemed to him so utterly unlike Mary that he could not guess what to do. He was so young and inexperienced in the ways of women that, for all he knew, he might be unduly alarmed or perhaps unduly confident.

"Are you feeling bad, my dear?" he asked.

Mary shook her head.

"What do you want me to do? Shall I fetch 'Ria Reynolds . . . or . . . or anyone?" he added, rather helplessly, for he knew that at such an hour and distance no one would wish to come, except it were a case of real need.

Mary forced herself to answer.

"No," she said dully, "I don't want 'Ria, and if I did, she's away nursing old Jake's grand-daughter . . . and

we could never pay her from now to April. I'm not ill, Eli, really I'm not ill, only tired an' . . . an' . . . Oh, can't you stay this one night?"

Eli reasoned with her very gently. How could he fail his master? Perhaps a hundred lambs might be born before morning. Young Bryce Hollis, his under shepherd, was inexperienced, and the prospects of the flock, not to speak of their own prospects, might be ruined by a few hours' truancy on the part of the head shepherd.

"And what could I say to the master?" he ended, "for he've always trusted me. 'Tisn't even as if you were feeling ill. Oh, Mary, my dear, do be a brave lass. I must go, you know I must," he went on desperately, as she still clung to him. "I'd be dishonest to stay away, except for a matter o' life and death. 'Tis only a few hours after all, for I'll be back by sun up to see ye. I'll get someone to-morrow to stay till Nancy comes back, an' lambing'll be over soon. Oh, Mary, my girl, don't cry, don't ye!"

She had drawn away from him and was sobbing with her face on the patchwork cushion.

He tried another suggestion.

"If you're lonesome, why not put on your bonnet and shawl and come down wi' me to the sheepfold? There's a bit o' fire in the wheel house stove, an' you'll be warm and comfortable. We've got that weakly lamb in there, an' you could help give him his bottle. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

She had looked up when he first spoke, with a vague hope, but her face fell again.

"Eli! I couldn't, not among the ewes now, with young Hollis there and all . . . and . . . and me like this. I'd be ashamed. I never heard tell of a woman going to the pens. Besides . . . it's not that . . . only . . ."

"If you'd tell me what it is, my dear, maybe I could help. Can't you tell me, Mary?"

"Oh, it's everything," she broke out miserably, "the way things is. Everything . . . all over the world . . . Oh, I've prayed and strove, I have, but it's no use. I think God has hidden His face from me . . . And I used to be so sure . . . about every little thing . . . sure . . . but sometimes I've thought you . . . Oh, Eli, perhaps I could be happy again if I thought that you were sure . . . quite sure that He can . . . that He will take care of me . . . of us . . . and . . . and everything."

Eli was kneeling beside her now, and she put her arms round his neck and looked into his face.

"But, Mary, my dear, you believe all that still, don't you?" he asked.

He was puzzled and unhappy, and his tone showed it.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, and fell again to tears.

What was he to do? Go he must, and soon, but how could he leave her in this distress? He must find some way to comfort her; and then he saw that the means lay in his hand. Who better than he could put to her lips the anodyne he had striven to distil for himself from Mary's teaching? Who better than he? For at last he knew her weakness and his own power.

He raised her to her feet, drawing her towards the lamp till they both stood in the full light.

"Mary, my dear, look at me," he said, and she obeyed him.

"You've believed and trusted all these years, and has God ever failed you?"

"N-no," she murmured, but it was as if she were reading her answer from his eyes.

"You know He will keep you as the apple of His eye, and hold you lest you should dash your foot against a stone?"

"Yes," she said.

The tone and the phrases he used were the familiar ones of her childhood, associated with all the happy and peaceful emotions her religion had brought to her through the impressionable days of her youth. She was yielding to the spell, for a spell it was, and Eli knew it, though like other necromancers, he too was influenced by the glamour of his own incantation.

His voice fell, low and caressing, and his eyes widened and softened as they looked into hers.

"You trust me dear, a sinful man, can you not trust God—one hour?"

He knew just the force of his veiled quotation, knew how it would strike home.

"Oh, Eli," she said, awestruck, "I . . . I didn't think of it like that. I can see now. I've been a doubting disciple, doubting . . . and weak . . . and wicked . . . but my faith's coming back to me already. It's coming back. Praise be to Him, and thanks to you for your blessed words. Oh, I'm so glad you can speak like that, my dear, my dear." She checked and her tone sharpened a note. "Eli, you're not just saying it? You . . . you yourself . . . you know it's true?"

For half a breathing space he waited, and then he answered,

"Mary, my dear, I know it's true," and so well had he played his part, that for the moment he believed himself as he spoke.

The charm had done its work. After a while she drew her hands from her husband's clasp and dried her eyes. With a woman's instinct she smoothed a loosened plait of her hair. She crossed the room, took his coat from the chair by the fireplace and held it out to him, then put up her face for his kiss.

"I'm quite happy now," she said. "I'll just tidy up and then go to bed."

"And go to sleep quickly, and not wake till dawn," added Eli, and though he smiled, his words had still a note of command.

"Even if I lie awake, I'll be glad to think of you doing your duty, dear. Whatever happens now I know 'twill be over-ruled for our good."

She spoke almost like a child saying a lesson.

Then her glance fell upon the white heap in the corner.

"Will you put those things on the top shelf of the cupboard before you go? 'Tis too high for me to reach unless I climb on the chair."

He stowed the clothes away as she bade him, and neither of them noticed that one garment had fallen behind the chair and lay on the floor.

"'Tis nice to be tall," she said contentedly, though her breathing was still a little uneven from her past weeping, and as she spoke she laid her cheek for a moment against his sleeve.

They kissed again at the door.

"Good-night, dear, I'll not forget you, nor your poor sheep when I say my prayers . . . and . . ." she paused a moment, "I know you won't forget me nor the one that's to come . . . when you say yours."

Her faint smile was the last thing he saw before he went out into the night.

As he groped his way down the path and along the road, waiting until his eyes should again grow accustomed to the obscurity, he told himself that he had done well.

Mary was comforted and he had been given words wherewith to comfort her. He was still a little in his character of the moments past, and was seeking for appropriate phrases. He had fed her with . . . with . . . what was it? "With the sincere milk of the word." The

text came to him with a little shock. Well, why not? Was not Mary sincere? Was not he himself . . . ? Anyway he wished to be so.

A breath of a following wind set the fog swirling round him and for a moment gave a glimpse of a shrouded moon, and with the wind came a pattering as of little bare feet running behind him. He half turned, and then smiled at himself; he knew that sound of dead leaves trundling along a hard surface well enough of old.

And all the while as he walked, back in his mind, hardly felt as yet, smouldered a tiny point of anger and shame, for though it had long been forgotten, he had broken a vow. For his own profit he had testified at second hand of God, and in so doing told less than the truth to Mary.

And yet, poor lad! what other could he have done?

The sheep were penned on a dry and sheltered piece of land rather more than a mile from the cottage, and after a couple of hundred yards Eli turned off from the road and took a footpath which led that way. The wheel house was drawn up just outside the fold, and as Eli approached he could see a dim halo of light shining from behind it. Turning the angle he found Bryce Hollis skinning a dead lamb by the light of a lanthorn hanging from a forked stick set in the ground.

"That sixter yow wi' the ragged ear, her wun't take ter t'other lamb nohow," the under shepherd announced. "Her be a stomachy sort o' critter, so I thought I'd have her own young un's skin ready to tie on turrer when you come back. Maybe 'twill deceive her, an' maybe 'twon't, for her be a cunning un, I knows."

"Lave be a minnit an' get th' lamb. I'll try the dog wi' her first," Eli answered, dropping into the broader dialect of his youthful days. It was always an instinct with him to suit his tongue to the job in hand.

He whistled Towzer who was lying under the van, quiet

except for his bob tail, which was wagging in greeting to his master. Hollis followed his chief, and together they entered the fold. The fog was lifting a little and it was possible to make out the nearer portions of the enclosure. This was formed of hurdles, thatched to give protection from wind and driving rain. The centre was open to the sky, and here the older and stronger lambs and their mothers lived till they could be turned out into the pasture. Round the walls were a series of small, roofed pens, also constructed of thatched hurdles, in which the ewes that had lately lambed, or were about to do so, were housed.

The two men moved quietly, Eli shrouding the lantern with his coat lest the light should disturb the ewes in the yard. One or two started up at his approach, but the sound of his familiar voice allayed their fears. Hollis was carrying the lamb they desired to foster upon the ewe whose own young one had died. He knelt down and cautiously introduced the orphan into the "stomachy" one's pen, and then gently withdrew, Eli holding the lantern meanwhile.

The lamb made a staggering attempt to approach this substitute for his parent, but the ewe, true to the character given her by the younger shepherd, put down her head and butted the changeling across the pen.

"To her, Towzer," said Eli quietly, and with a little yelp the dog sprang to the doorway. Instantly the ewe placed herself between the intruder and the prostrate lamb, and stood there stamping defiance. Each time Towzer made a feint of attack, she again put herself in a posture of defence.

"Tha'll do, bwoy," Eli said at last, and Towzer effaced himself after the manner of his intelligent kind. The two men withdrew for a few moments; when they looked in

again the ewe was licking her fosterling, which soon began to suck.

"Look at that now!" said Hollis in surprise, "I never thought as how her'd do ut!"

Eli watched the pair for a few moments, then drew the hurdle across the opening again and went towards another part of the fold, while Hollis, taking the lantern, began slicing turnips near the gate.

The air was much clearer now, and in the grey of the moonlight Eli could see a party of the older lambs holding an absurd little festival of their own. Two or three sarsen stones crowned a swell of the ground here, and up and down this knoll the little creatures were racing, or capering in groups on the summit. They looked so fantastic with their thick legs and small bodies and shaking ears and tails that Eli was constrained to laugh. It gave him a keen pleasure to see them so happy and so strong.

At the same instant and very faint, yet sounding through his own laughter, he thought he heard a cry. He listened a moment, but could detect nothing unusual. Out in the woods and fields at night you may often hear strange noises and he thought no more of it.

He opened another pen, peering intently into the shadow to distinguish any movement of the animal therein, and as he did so the cry, whatever it might be, was repeated.

To Eli's sensitive ear it had a quality that seemed strange, for it brought no sense of locality with it, so that he did not know in what direction to turn to listen for it again.

At that moment Hollis whistled to him from the other end of the fold, and Eli went across to help him with a ewe in trouble.

They were very busy after that, and by three o'clock

the flock was larger by about seventy lambs, and not a weakly one among them. Eli did not think there would be more for some hours to come, possibly not till the following evening.

He and Hollis went to the wheel house, and while the lad brewed some tea Eli attended to the needs of the weanling lying in a basket by the stove. He was very weary, for many nights he had had but little sleep, and his scene with Mary had been a strain upon him. He told the under shepherd to lie down and take an hour's rest, and Bryce, nothing loth, curled up in his cloak and was soon sleeping heavily, while Eli, seated on a box, drowsed by the fire. The influence of the dead hours of the night weighed upon him, the hours that suck the vitality of watchers slowly from them till the tides of dawn return.

He would wake Bryce at four, and oh! it would be good to lie down then and slip into unconsciousness for a while before he went home for breakfast, and the work of the day began anew. He stirred the stove, and going to the van door, looked out. All was quiet among the sheep and he seated himself once more.

Against his will he began to go over again the incidents of his supper hour.

Poor little Mary, asleep in her warm bed! He was glad she had not come with him, she was better off there. He had often heard that women in her condition were restless and given to strange fancies. Well, it would be over before long, thank goodness, and they said that to a woman, her baby paid for all. 'Twas a queer world anyway . . . but how she had cried and sobbed! It went to your heart to think of it—his Mary always so gentle and calm, sobbing, with her face on the patchwork pillow.

He must have dozed then, for he started awake at the sound of a loud, strange cry. He saw Hollis sitting up,

his hair touzled over his forehead, staring at him with round, stupid eyes.

"What was it? Did you hear?" Eli stammered, scarcely yet awake.

"Should think I did hear," growled the lad, and then grinned. "Be you a-dreamin' o' the devil to holler out like that?"

"Was it me hollerin', Bryce? I thought 'twas outside," asked Eli, amazed to find himself trembling from head to foot.

"Did 'ee holler? Why, first 'ee wakes I wi' yer gruntin' an' groanin' an' then, just when I was a-goin' to call out to 'ee, ye lets off like a scritch owl, fit to scare a chap, an' then ye wants ter know if ye did holler. Holler? ye must 'a took yerself fer a vixen I should judge by yer nise. Peewhits couldn' hold a cannle to ye."

Both shepherds went their rounds after this, and finding some odd jobs to do the time ran by, and it was past four when Eli lay down in his turn. He slept like a log and woke somewhat late, so that it was nearly sunrise when he started for home, leaving Bryce getting his breakfast, since the undershepherd, whose lodging lay at a distance, preferred to take most of his meals at the hut.

It was a beautiful dawn, still and clear. The fog of the previous night had turned to hoar frost, and as the sun came redly up over the hills beyond Attiwell, every leaf and blade of grass seemed edged with silver. Eli, content with his night's work, whistled softly on his way. After breakfast he would go round by Anne Brown's and see if Nancy could come back, and if not, ask Anne to find someone else to stop with Mary. Anne could always get things done when she had a mind. He would light the fire when he arrived and take Mary a cup of morning tea and persuade her to lie in bed a little and let him get breakfast. She needed rest, he thought. Towzer ran on ahead,

in a hurry for his meal also. As Eli came up the garden, the dog was sniffing beneath the door. He put up a paw and scratched.

"All in good time, Towzer," said Eli, as he lifted the latch.

The sun looked in after him through the open door, but the house struck cold after his brisk walk. There was something odd about the room. For an instant Eli did not realise what it was, then he saw that the supper cloth had been left on the table. A saying of Mrs. Thorogood's floated hazily back to him from the days of his childhood: "to leave the tablecloth laid all night was a sign of . . ." Before he could remember the adage his eye caught something white hanging out of the corner cupboard. The door stood open, and garments in disarray were half falling from the shelves. Beneath lay the old chair on its side, a broken leg showing pale splinters against the dark wood, and a scatter of dry rot dust whitened the tiles around. He did not yet grasp the meaning of what he saw, but the blood seemed to stand still in his veins. He turned slowly towards the staircase. There too, the door was open, and Towzer, near it, looking upward. The dog turned and came towards his master, then ran back once again, and the man knew in his heart what lay above when he heard the beast break into a long, shivering whine.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

"When man's desire with fate doth war, this, this
remains alone,
To hoist the sail and let the gale and the waters
bear us on."

—LI PO.
From "A Lute of Jade."

IT was the second of March.

Outside the Copse Cottage a group of sombrely clad folk of various ages were standing. Amos Brown was there, Alfred Jackson, and Symonds and Eli's friend, the gardener from Wintershot Park, who held a wreath of white flowers. Lady Holt had not sent it, but she had informed her gardener that *he* wished to offer this tribute, and that she and Sir John would graciously indulge his desire. Wreaths were not commonly seen at cottage funerals then, and left to himself the gardener would not have thought of making one, but he took the hint very kindly.

The door of the cottage was open and Mrs. Jell sat within, dressed in new crape-trimmed garments. She was weeping into a large handkerchief with a deep black border, and 'Ria Reynolds was in attendance. Jell, tidied up for the occasion, moved restlessly about. Home-made wine and cake were laid out on the table, for Anne Brown had seen to all details. Had she herself suffered a tragic bereavement and possessed a little money laid by, she would have found much comfort in a "driving

funeral" with a befeathered hearse, and the undertaker's men, at any rate, wearing top hats with "weepers" twisted round the crowns, but she had not even suggested it to Eli.

There was a sound of heavy footsteps on the stair, and four men brought the coffin down into the kitchen, then took it upon their shoulders, and the little procession formed up in the lane.

Eli and Anne were the last to leave the house. He locked the door and handed her the key.

She looked surprised.

"I'll tell you afterwards," he said, and walked to his place immediately behind the coffin, and next to Mrs. Jell.

From time to time on their way towards Bourne, a fresh bearer would relieve one of those who had first taken up the burthen.

As they reached the hill above the village they could hear the bell tolling from the church below.

The children, who walked near their parents, were silent and awestruck, very conscious of their black adornments.

It was a still day, grey and cold, and there seemed no sound in the world but that of slow feet crunching the gravelly surface of the road, and the occasional clang of the bell.

A few more women were waiting in the village, and followed the mourners into the church and again from the church to the grave.

When the coffin was lowered, Mr. Walker made the accustomed pause while all present moved forward and looked down.

The women, for the most part, were weeping silently, but tender-hearted Alf Jackson broke into audible sobs and turned away among the tomb stones.

Eli stood, dry-eyed, he only glanced down, and then

looked away to the ploughland ridge beyond the school, where it stood, bare and brown, against the sky.

What had all these folk in black, these ropes and planks, and the wooden thing down in the hole in the ground, to do with him?

It was all done, all gone, there was nothing left of the old life, it was as if he himself had died. He knew what he was about to do. Everything had made his way clear for that. Everything was ready. There would be a little more talking, and then he, the ghost, would leave all this behind and go out to find the place appointed, wherever that might be.

Mr. Walker went back to the Vestry and then home. The clerk locked up the church. Amos, as instructed, had taken the funeral party away towards the Jells', where refreshments were to be served. Only a few loiterers were left watching the sexton filling in the grave, when Eli beckoned Anne into the porch.

She looked up into his white face, and her eyes filled again with tears.

"I'm not coming up there, Anne," he said, jerking his head towards the Jells'. "I'm going away."

"What do you mean?" she said aghast. "You . . . you don't mean you're going now?"

He nodded.

"But . . . but how can you?"

"I've seen the master. Lambing's pretty nigh done now. He can manage wi' old Smith and a new lad at the Up Farm if Jim Bates comes down from there to help Bryce. Bryce'll take the dog. I've arranged about the house an' all. For the furniture I want you and Amos to have that. You've been good friends to me and her that's gone. Sell it or keep it as you've got a mind."

"Oh, I can't, Eli. Why, there's . . . there's Mrs. Jell!"

"I've done what's right by Mrs. Jell. There's money put by for her where she can get it and Jell can't. I've fixed wi' Mr. Walker to see to that for her."

Anne gasped.

"But, Eli, next Sunday, you'll wait an' go to church next Sunday? 'Tis only right."

His face set dangerously.

"Right or wrong, church or chapel, I baint a-coming. I done wi' all that from this day on. See here!" He turned towards her and flung out his hand. "All my life since I were a little un, I've lived like a sheep, driven an' penned. I've done what I was bid, and gone where I was sent, and learned what was thought good for me to know, an' I did my best to take it all down. Aye, I've even tried to believe accordin' to other folks believin'. And what do it all come to? What help did she get when she needed it? No, I've eat chopped vittles too long, an' I've done wi' food outen a trow. Man's life or devil's, I'll live in a pen no more. I be goin' for a sailor."

Anne caught his arm.

"Eli. You never!"

He stood rigid. Heaven knows what either of them thought a sailor's life might be. "To go for a soldier" was considered a disgrace then, but it was an understood way of life. Bourne folk knew nought of the sea.

"Good-bye, Anne," he said at last. "I'm goin' to change at the Symonds'. I've left a bundle there."

Anne threw her conventions to the winds, and standing on tip-toe, she put her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Eli, lad, you won't be too wild, will 'ee? An' you'll write sometimes?"

At that his face twisted into a ghost of one of his old whimsical smiles.

"Maybe I will an' maybe I won't. It depends on how things go. It's sink or swim wi' me this time, Anne."

He disengaged himself gently and went from her.

She followed him to the churchyard gate and stood watching him as he went down the lane.

He did not turn back, and was soon hidden from her by the turn of the road.

CHAPTER XV

PORT OF DEPARTURE

IT was nine o'clock at night when Eli reached Southampton.

He was bewildered by the lights and noise and crowd. Though he had often seen trains, it was the first time he had travelled by railway. All day and every day since his loss he had, as it were, held a screen betwixt himself and full realisation. He had his work to do and many arrangements to make, and all this, together with the stunning character of the blow, had helped him to keep his pain at bay. His preoccupations were now over for a while, and throughout his journey he had fought back his anguish, talking to his fellow passengers and fixing his thoughts on the details of the swiftly passing landscape and the incidents of travel; but always he felt his trouble waiting for him like an inimical spiritual presence, ready to overwhelm him if he relaxed tension even for a moment. He was thankful for the strangeness round him, even for the weariness and hunger that forced him to go forth and seek some place of refuge in this big and forbidding town.

Led as by an instinct, he soon found himself in the lower quarter not far from the docks. Merchant sailors and colliers were there in numbers. Here and there groups of aggressively clean Bluejackets moved amongst the dingy crowd of working people, or the less frequent scarlet of a soldier's coat challenged the eye. Knots of bold-faced girls hung about the street corners and round

the doors of the public houses, laughing boisterously, or shouting to the men who passed them. Drunken folk reeled by now and again, and one bedraggled old woman, with bonnet awry, hobbled unsteadily along. She stumbled as she neared Eli, and would have fallen in the gutter had he not stretched out an arm to save her. The fumes of drink wafted to him as he held her a moment, and a girl in a beflooned skirt and a jacket trimmed with worn fur, turned to look at the pair and laughed.

"Hullo, Johnny Chawbacon!" she called to Eli. "That's a smart girl's got you in tow this time!"

The old woman straightened herself for a moment, cursed the young one for an impudent drab, and then wandered away and was lost in the crowd. The girl stood looking at Eli. She had a keen, sallow face and a mobile mouth, yellow brown eyes like those of some fierce bird looked out from under the brim of a battered but befeathered hat, her cheeks and her lips were reddened. There was an untamed and courageous look about her, as of a creature of prey, dependent solely upon herself, a note to which something in Eli answered like a vibrating string. He returned her look a moment and then spoke.

"I'm hungry," he said, "where can I get some victuals?"

"I'll show you," she replied, and led him down a smaller street and into a bare wooden room where a man was frying fish.

The girl ordered two portions and seated herself next to Eli in a corner of the room. The place was brightly lit, warm and crowded, the air was heavy with the smell of hot fat, but the rough food was good and savoury, and Eli who had tasted nothing that day but a piece of bread for breakfast, eat ravenously and in silence. The girl soon tired of her food and watched him curiously.

"What's your name?" she said suddenly after a while.

Eli rested his knife and fork on the table, and looked around him. Since he was a ghost and this the place appointed, he would take what his new life offered. Already he found a sordid kind of satisfaction in the noise and crowding and general disreputable atmosphere of the place.

"Plenty of devils in hell besides me," was the phrase that rose in his mind as he looked at the people about him. But what had the old Eli Buckle to do with all this? With something of the instinct that bids a religious to change his name when he enters the new world of the cloister, Eli turned to answer his companion.

"Well?" said the girl.

What should he say to her? A memory of the fiddling gipsy who had opened a door to him in boyhood, prompted his reply.

"My name's Bill," he said, "Bill Blake."

The girl gave a sarcastic little laugh.

"As good a name as another," she said shortly, and pushed away her plate.

"Well, that's victuals. Now for some drink, and then what d'ye say to a bit o' fun? Life's short anyhow, but there's one thing I've been wondering, and that's what you're doing here?"

"I want to go for a sailor," Eli answered as he drew out some silver and paid for the food.

"So that's it," she said, looking at him with her head on one side, and together they went out and sought the brightly-lit main street once more. They visited a public house and Eli called for beer. The girl made a face and demanded port wine, and something bearing that name was served to her.

They both drank there for some while, and then she took Eli away with her to a place of entertainment. It was some kind of a music hall, and as they entered a

"Lion Comique" was bawling the usual inanities of the period about "booze" and "girls" and a mother-in-law. The cockney accent made it difficult for Eli, already somewhat bemused with fatigue and ale, to follow the words, but he joined in the loud laughter and picked up the tune of the chorus.

Then a girl in green tights and a low-cut pink bodice sprang on the stage and began to sing. Her voice was shrill and metallic and between the verses of her ditty she danced with a kind of desperate gaiety.

Eli stared at the gaudy figure whirling before the painted scene. The lights seemed to grow brighter and brighter, and a haze to hang about the other parts of the building away from the performer. Once or twice his head fell forward but he recovered himself.

The song seemed to have lasted for hours, for a lifetime, it had always been going on; then, small and bright, like the field of a little magic lantern he had once seen at a missionary meeting, a scene began to form itself before his eyes. It was the kitchen in his own house, as he had often seen it, the lamp lit and standing upon its bead mat in the centre of the table, the teacups hanging along the edge of the dresser, the books on the shelves, the corner cupboard . . .

"My God," he muttered, "I can't stand this," and he rose and went out. The girl followed him and caught his arm.

"There's a public house," he said thickly, staring across the street. "Come on! Quick!"

She checked him an instant, looking in his face and thinking.

"Not there," she said at last. "This way," and took him by another and quieter street to a tavern where the window bore a card announcing "Good Beds." It was an old-fashioned little place, nearly empty then. It had a

sanded floor and red curtains, wooden partitions backed uncushioned benches set in pairs with a deal table between each two.

Eli sat down in one of these alcoves and sank his head in his hands.

"Get some beer," he said.

The girl stood gazing at him a moment.

"Augh! What's the good of beer—to you?" she made answer, and there was pity and understanding in her tones.

She went across to the potman.

"Here, Jimmy, gin—and hurry up," she said.

Eli took the liquor she brought him and gulped it down, then shoved his glass towards her, mutely signing for more.

"That's right," she said, "quickest way out o' Manchester, ain't it?"

The clock, always a little fast, struck twelve. The potman made a movement.

"All right, Jimmy, I'm going," the girl said, then she fixed that official with a steady glance. "Look here, this is my cousin Bill, Bill Blake from the country. I'm coming round for him to-morrow morning. You get him to bed. He'll pay you all right, you needn't fear. See that nothing happens to him, or I shawn't bow next time I meets *you* in Hyde Pawk."

She gave a little mocking laugh and went out, and Jimmy followed her with his eyes.

So it was that for the first time in his life Eli went dead drunk to his bed.

Once, away in Ewebourne Vale, an old countryman showed me a sword that had belonged to some soldier forbear of his more than a hundred years ago.

"Ah," he said, nodding his head, "an' I'd use un meself too if need were! 'Tis rusty now, but I tell 'ee

whut I'd a-do if the French were to come, aye, or the Rooshians or the Prooshians or any o' that lot. See! I'd put un in the swill tub, I 'ood, an' lave un there two dree day, mebbe more, an' then I'd take un an' zharp un. 'Tis the best way wi' a thing like that if zo be as a' ain't altogether lost a's natur'."

I suppose it may happen that a man here and there may need the same treatment before he regains his. I cannot tell, but if it be so, it may a little, a very little, console us when we consider this swill tub of a world.

Next morning, as she had promised, the girl called for Eli. He was white and silent. She took command of him and he obeyed her like a child.

"If you want a ship you must get yourself rigged different to that," she told him, looking with disfavour at his rough frieze coat, his corduroys and leather gaiters. "In a place like this everyone takes advantage of a countryman. If you don't know the ropes you'd best look as if you did."

She took him to a slop shop and bargained with the owner, whom she induced to take Eli's working garb in part payment for serge trousers, a cap and a jersey, the change being effected in the back shop. She made him buy the sort of gunny-sack arrangement that sailors use, and stock it with such equipment as he would need in his new profession. She next took him to an eating house and by sheer bullying, made him swallow some dinner.

"Seems to me, Bill, that the sooner you're afloat, the better for you," she said, with a half sigh, when the meal was over.

As they walked among the warehouses and docks she gave him sage counsel as to crimps and boarding masters, and workhouse and coffin ships, and a few of the innumerable traps set, the better to rob sailor men, afloat and ashore. Eli heard but little. He looked dully at the

steamers and sailing craft, the railway trucks and the great cranes, and the oily green water lapping against the quays.

The girl hailed an acquaintance, a sailor, who called another in his turn, and they held discussion together. At last, Eli never quite knew how, he found himself in an office signing papers, the import of which he but vaguely gathered, and then he was standing on a wharf by a collier brig, and a man came along a gang plank, and having talked to Eli's companion, bade the landsman follow and went again on board.

Eli and the girl were alone now, except that men passed behind them from time to time, rolling casks from a steamer near by into a big open shed that hid most of the view.

"Good-bye, Bill, and good luck to you," she said, and held out her hand.

"Stop a bit," Eli answered, and beyond "yes" and "no" they were the first words he had uttered that day.

He felt for a leathern purse which held all that was left of the small sum he had brought with him. He poured the contents into his palm, counted it carefully and gave half to the girl.

Her eyes widened a little and she seemed to be waiting for something. He did not speak but went towards the gang plank; as he set foot upon it, he turned and looked over his shoulder, and she saw him lower his lids and lift his chin with a flicker of a smile. That was his only farewell. She stood watching him as he stumbled among a confusion of ropes and other objects whose uses were strange to him. Then the man who had spoken to him before, came and led him forward, and they both disappeared below.

* * * * *

Now the scenes of Eli's childhood were the scenes I

lived among when I too was a child, and the land where he spent the years of his middle age, I knew and loved, as youth and man, but though I have crossed many waters, I am no sailor and I cannot see the ocean as a mariner sees it.

Still less can I look as a sailor looks at that ragged edge of slums with which humanity has bordered the waterways of the world. I think that these squalid cosmopolitan fringes are all that most seafarers know of the lands to which they sail. When they speak of Egypt or of China, they often mean no more than the harbour purlieus of Alexandria or Hong Kong, and the thought of India brings to their minds no statelier images than those of the wharves and docks and drinking places of Calcutta or Karachi or Bombay.

To these, and such as these, they look forward with aching desire through the months they spend out of sight of land, often ill-fed and in danger, always in toil and monotonous endurance of the hard, rough life of the sea.

It is from these that too many of them, when forespent with debauchery, and wearied with the endless chicane they find on land, turn back with little regret, to the discipline and hardship of their floating monasteries.

More isolated for long weeks at a time than any convent set among the unmoving crests of the hills, are these little communities whose houses go thrashing through the spume of the waves or lie becalmed between the blue or misty immensities of the water and the sky.

IV: THE SEAFARER

IV: THE SEAFARER

CHAPTER XVI

GLIMPSES

"Touching the Adventures and Perils which we
. . . . are contented to bear and do take upon
us in this Voyage, they are of the Seas."

—LLOYD'S POLICY OF INSURANCE.

SINCE I have likened ships to monasteries (a comparison which I admit to be bold) it may be curious very briefly to consider some aspects of the strange rule that is accepted by the monks, or rather, friars of the sea.

Their austerities are imposed by no ecclesiastical hierarchy nor by any desire on their own part for spiritual blessings. The strangest reasons send them on their wanderings.

Perhaps in a great city a manufacturer, anxious no doubt for the good of mankind, will expend a King's ransom upon the emblazoning of hoardings and the publication of strongly-worded statements as to the virtues of a particular pill or floor-cloth or soap. Shortly afterwards many apparently reasonable persons will find themselves suffering from inexplicable cravings for this commodity, and straightway companies of brave and skilful men will leave their homes and go forth to suffer heat and cold, danger, fatigue, and often ghastly diseases to bring back to the philanthropist the ingredients for his invaluable preparation.

These men are paid, say you? Yes, they are paid.

In Eli's time they received about two pounds ten shillings a month, due only at the end of three years, food generally so bad, unsuitable and insufficient as to make scurvy common, lodging in the wet and noisome fo'castles of crazy, over-loaded, over-insured ships, and little protection either by law or custom for life, limb or liberty. These were the dazzling baits held out to induce men to "follow the sea"; but always youth will answer when the spirits of Romance and Adventure call, and though there have been many fears that the supply of English seamen might fail, I do not think that this country has ever suffered a real lack of sailors. The fears, however, have been useful, for they have thrown light on fo'castles and many equally dark places, and together with the efforts of a few just men after the manner of Plimsoll, they have bettered things maritime now some deal.

Of course there were both good ships and bad, just and kind officers, and officers brutal and cruel set in almost irresponsible authority over men of every sort, from the best to the most debased of human beings, and these sailed upon lucky voyages when all went well, and voyages when every evil from fire to famine would dog a devoted craft. Eli took his share of all these things, but on the whole he was fortunate as the life of a seafarer went then.

But though he became a good seaman he had an odd certainty that he would not die a sailor. Why or how he did not know, yet he felt sure that a time must come when he would turn from this life that he both loved and hated. Till then it seemed to him that it would be impossible to embrace any other calling, though he could give himself no reason for the fancy, if that be the right name for so indefinite and unexpressed an idea.

Somehow connected with this feeling was the fact that

during all his seafaring life he never wrote to Anne Brown.

I have said that Eli was fortunate. Colliers were notoriously the roughest craft afloat, except perhaps whalers, and among colliers those from Cardiff held a bad pre-eminence. Eli's first ship was a Cardiff collier, but her Captain was a man that any youth might have been proud to serve. For this reason Eli's voyages in her, for all the hardships they entailed upon a landsman unbroken to the sea, were not unbearable. After a while, when he had learned his work and was beginning to take a pride in it, he shifted to a larger vessel running between Neath and Huelva, carrying general cargo one way, and copper on the return voyage.

Being a landsman, he had not a sailor's prejudice against learning to swim. He found his boyish practice in the Ewebourne pools helped him from the first, and aided by his long reach, he became rather a show performer in the water. He lost the stiffness of the heavily-booted countryman, a stiffness never natural to him, and gained the litheness of the often barefooted sailor much of whose work is aloft, for he passed all the earlier years of his sea life aboard sailing craft. Indeed he always preferred them to steamers, though the crews of the latter, being on the whole better fed, paid and treated, were considered to be the pick of the profession.

The Neath ship was wrecked off the Mumbles on a winter night, and I fancy that the men aboard her owed their rescue to Eli, who swam ashore with a life line. He would never tell me much about his adventure, except that he had found the water cold, but he once showed me some great scars on his shins which he said were caused by barnacle shells when he was trying to land on that occasion. His injuries meant hospital for a good many weeks,

and after hospital some hungry days while he was looking for a ship.

His life during these years was, I believe, that of the more reckless of those around him, no better and no worse, except that there was not the child-like quality about Eli so often to be found in men who have been bred to the sea. What he did of good or evil, he did knowingly, and when he let his passions loose, it was not that he lacked power to rein them in, had it pleased him to do so. To his officers he was known as William Blake, A.B., a steady and a skilful worker; to his shipmates, as a man quiet and pleasant as a rule, but with fits of fantastic humour and a tongue that on occasion could scorch like a hot wire. In short, they found him a bad man to fight and a good man to drink with, and acted accordingly. Among them he made friends good and true, but always the chances and changes of his trade parted him from them. He did not forget them, but he did not regret them greatly; their coming and their going were part of the life he was to lead, meanwhile he "watched the water running by" and waited, learning many things.

One of these, and perhaps the one that sank deepest was the sovereign and majestic beauty of great waters.

The scenes that I seemed to have watched through his eyes during this period are but few, and they show to me as scattered pictures having no chronological sequence. I have spoken amiss of Eli if I have let it be thought that he abounded much in description or in consecutive speaking of any kind, but after his own fashion he has given me to see one or two of these pictures very clearly.

Once it was a moment of a summer evening with the ship coasting down channel and the water looking like crinkled silk, the magical blue moment when the sun is down and the night not yet come, and the lights of the coast towns shine out with a faint, sparkling radiance

through the film of mist rising from the land behind them ; a moment when a man standing quietly at the wheel or on look-out duty may hear, made faint and very sad by distance and the gathering darkness, the sound of bands playing dance music on the shore.

Another time it was a glimpse of the North Atlantic with broken masses of dark cloud in the sky and shafts of light falling between them, picking out now the distant and now the nearer ranges of the slate-coloured and green hills of the sea.

Or a bitter dawn in a sullen sky and one great iceberg looking like the top of a half submerged snow mountain with a smother of spray at its foot, drifting down to the southward as the ship went by.

Or it might be a sound that had struck him, such as the loud *z-i-rrap* and flutter of a foresail split from top to bottom by a sudden squall.

There were scenes in the hazy warmth of the Doldrums too, when opalescent clouds steamed up from the sea day after day till the sky was a forgotten thing and the nights fell to such utter darkness that there was not a glimmer from the water though the ship might be rolling fit to tilt the masts out of her on the oily swell.

There was one little incident I set down here at greater length, since I know that for some reason it hung in Eli's memory, and because I fancy it may have served to influence his conduct in what appears to have been a kind of crisis in his life later on.

He had been some seven or eight years at sea, and was on a voyage to the East and Australia through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, a route he had not travelled before. He was on a liner, touching at many ports and making a journey far fuller of colour and incident than the long sailing voyages he had been used to, voyages round the Cape or the Horn, for months out of sight of

land, away in the most lonely and desolate parts of the sea.

Aden was his first sight of the real East, but it was only Aden as seen from the harbour, with the many-coloured crowd bringing merchandise to sell to the passengers, the piled up town and behind it the great scorched precipice, and all the blue air full of the wheeling and shrill whistling of kites. Later he had sniffed the queer, faint, wild-beast smell of Socotra as they passed by the northern shore, and for days had seen the sun rise, big and red, over the bow, or set astern as the ship ploughed across the hot, melancholy blue of the Indian Ocean. They steered closer inland that voyage than usual, and he had watched, at first faint and opalescent, then in strong reds and greens, and then pearly again, the slopes and hills of Travancore rise and pass and sink behind him; and then came a night when Eli's duty brought him on deck to alter the canvas screens put up for the comfort of the passengers, since a head wind was blowing. When the work was done he went forward and leaned for a moment over the side to watch the phosphorescent sparks dancing with the star reflections in the dark water. It was then that he caught for the first time that perfume of Ceylon, of which many travellers beside the excellent and accomplished Bishop Heber, have written. I have smelt those "spicy breezes" myself, away out at sea, some twelve hours before landfall, but there is more than cinnamon on the gale. It tells of sun-baked earth, and cattle, and mustard oil, and strange vegetation and all the magic of Lanka; Lanka, the prison of Sita and the tomb of the saintly Mahenda, dead on his hill two thousand years ago. Of course Eli had never heard of them, but the scent moved him strangely, and at dusk of dawn, as they neared Colombo, it was with a startled kind of recognition that he looked up high above the town and saw the crooked

finger of some high peak darkly beckoning from a wild purple and golden sky.

They entered the harbour as the morning mists lifted, and as the sun rose and the colour and heat of day flooded all around, the passengers came on deck and waited to go ashore. Some new quarantine regulations detained them awhile, and Eli was posted at the gangway to keep pedlars and visitors and touts from coming aboard till all formalities had been complied with.

Another liner lay in harbour that day, berthed near Eli's boat. Presently from amongst the dark mass of shipping nearer shore, a little skiff came floating. An old man was rowing, a half caste Cingalee from his dress and appearance, and in the stern sheets sat a nun. Her wide, black sleeves covered her hands, and her head was bent, so that looking down from the height of the passenger deck, her face was hidden by her coif and veil.

As the boat drew near the passengers of the two liners having nothing to do gathered at the side to watch.

The boat came first to Eli's steamer and when it stopped he saw the nun cross herself very slowly and solemnly. Then she stood up and held out her cloak in both hands with an almost reluctant gesture of appeal. She gave but one glance at the row of curious faces above her, and then, as he thought, looked beyond them to the sun-filled sky.

What there was in her plain, pale face that touched him so nearly Eli did not know. A look of aloofness perhaps, as of one waiting till some great trial should be over, a look of one who suffered indignity and pain, for a season and for a purpose. He took the only coin he had and dropped it into her robe. She did not move. The passengers began to imitate his example. No one knew the object for which she begged, but they vied with each other in throwing her money, laughing as the coins

fell into her cloak or missed and rattled on the planking of the boat and were picked up by the old Cingalee.

When the shower of coins ceased the boat moved over to the other liner and the same scene was enacted there.

By this time Eli had received orders to allow visitors to arrive and the passengers to depart. There was some bustle for a while, then he found himself standing not far from an elderly lady who was talking to a visitor in clerical dress. Eli caught scraps of their conversation. They were speaking of the suppliant, who had now vanished as she had come.

"Unusual for a nun to go about in public alone," the lady was saying. She had turned towards Eli but her companion faced the other way.

"Strange personality . . . bishop . . . rescue home . . . young girls . . ." was all he heard of the cleric's answer.

But the lady raised her voice a little and spoke more clearly.

"Then I hope it will be very different from some others I have seen," she said, a little sharply. "Excellent people, no doubt, but what do they think they will gain by making the path of virtue . . ."

Her voice trailed off as the pair began to walk to and fro. Her companion seemed to be putting forward some view with which the lady disagreed. As they approached Eli once more she was speaking again.

"Ignorance . . . pleasure and adventure . . . pious and well-intentioned cruelty . . . attractions of hot soap-suds in a tin laundry, even with a cross on top . . . repression . . . reaction . . ." he heard her say as they drew near, passed and turned to the other side of the deck.

Eli had listened idly, scarcely knowing that he did so, but though the words were scattered he could easily supply the context. Now and again folk told him more than

they realised, and in his time he had heard a bitter jest or so made by those whom such matters might have concerned very nearly. Better the hog trough, they implied, than some ways out that offered, and one or more of the speakers had essayed those roads and knew.

He thought of these things sometimes when the face of the nun came back to him, as it had a trick of doing for a while.

I think it was that voyage that began to turn his thoughts landward once again, though the change came very slowly. In Australia there was some kind of a broom in progress, and tempted by the offer of high wages, many sailors deserted and went up country, but Eli had no desire to follow their example, though at times such a misdemeanour might be more than winked at by officers and owners, not however, by those of the regular steamship lines.

During his time in that employ he had been kind to a sick apprentice, and the boy had lent him a book on navigation and passed on the little he himself knew for the instruction of his benefactor. Eli found the subject interesting. He might, perhaps, have raised himself to officers' rank, "crawled through the hawse pipe to the quarter-deck" as the phrase ran. Such promotions were not unknown in the merchant service, but his ambitions did not lie that way. Indeed, I think, he was a man singularly destitute of ambition in the usual sense of the word.

He was content, as I have said, to "watch the water running by," and so another three or four years went past.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GOLDEN IMAGE

"This is the Robe I wore when you and I
Went hand-in-hand beneath the flowering
Boughs of the Plum Trees in the early Spring.
Ah! touch the faded garment tenderly,
Some withered petal to the folds may cling."

—FROM A SURIMONO.

ELI was in Kobe. He was on a sailing craft once more, the *James and Lucy*, a full-rigged ship owned by Gibbon and Fratrison. She lay out in the bay waiting to load local and Kyoto porcelains, and goods from Osaka; later she would put in at Yokohama to complete her cargo, which was consigned to San Francisco, and from thence she was homeward bound round the Horn with such freight as she might find.

At that time England and America were awaking to the fact that there was still one country in the world where a beautiful national art was alive, and with the whole-hearted co-operation of her commercial and ruling classes, were doing their best to kill it. That they have not quite succeeded even yet, is not the fault of any of us.

Work was slack at the moment on board and Eli had an afternoon's holiday.

It was one of those silvery days of earliest Spring that gave a peculiar charm to the shores of the Inland Sea, grey days, yet full of touches of subtle colour like the robes of the women of the country.

Eli loitered up a long street of little brown shops and

listened for a moment to a Pilgrim in a straw hat fashioned like a bee-hive, playing on a bamboo flute. Two handsome lads in ceremonial dress came quickly past him, walking with the beautiful elastic carriage of trained swordsmen, their fans stuck in their sashes, and their little lacquered medicine cases swinging at their sides. A weedy youth in pyjama trousers, an undervest worn by way of a shirt beneath an ancient frock coat, the whole finished off by a bowler hat and sandshoes, looked after his two fellow-countrymen with hardly concealed disdain.

Japan was then in the throes of one of the severest "crazes" that even she has known, a craze for everything western, in some ways foolish and even brutal in its iconoclasmic fervours, but the outcome of a patriotism and desire for knowledge so intense as to lift it high above the contempt due to a mere vagary of fashion.

Eli knew nothing of all the intellectual ferment going on round him, nor guessed at the treasures of art and tradition and philosophy enshrined in the life of this quiet seeming Oriental town. Like most sailors, he had picked up a foreign word here and there in the ports he had visited, but he could speak no other language than his own, and for any human companionship when abroad was perforce thrown upon the society of such persons as found it profitable to learn English. Not always the worthiest citizens of their respective countries, these.

Now, as he walked down the street a gaily dressed child ran out of a house, and seeing him, strove to check itself and turn round at the same moment, a manoeuvre that ended in the shedding of wooden clogs, and a thud, as the infant collapsed on the ground. Eli proffered aid, but at that the child's sobs of amazement became shrieks of such real terror that the helper desisted and went on his way, while the baby, running back to its mother, wailed to her that an ogre in the hideous semblance of a Mister Foreign

Person, had endeavoured to carry it off, doubtless for table use.

It seems a pity that in their endeavours to reach Heaven the ancients of Babylon only succeeded in creating such lasting barriers on earth.

Eli went westward towards Hiogo and then turned up by the banks of a watercourse to the higher part of the town. He had noted at some distance away above a dark belt of trees, a strange pink mist resting on a brown hillside, and he wished to discover the reason of the appearance. His path led him through a suburban quarter consisting of scattered houses of the better class, probably the homes of traders and small officials. Behind the open fences and through the screening bushes, he sometimes caught sight of little gardens, almost flowerless but having a strange charm of their own. After looking at one or two he became vaguely aware that he was in the presence of an art entirely new to him, of the meaning and aims of which he was ignorant, but these little arrangements of rocks and pebbles, shrubs, and tiny fountains of water, looked as if they had a meaning. He could fancy that they might be speaking in an unknown tongue, and, as it were, in thin, goblin voices, of things such as he had sensed in beautiful and solitary places at home; on the downs, for instance, when he was a boy keeping sheep through the long, sunny days.

Japan was a queer kind of place, he thought. Something pleasant seemed to be intended even in the way the palings were set in the fences and the tiles upon the roofs.

He was nearly out of the town by now, on a road bordered with trees and trending inland and upwards. He followed it for a while and then turned by a path leading under a red wooden archway, into a grove of magnificent trees. The ground beneath was levelled and carefully swept, and here and there were wooden buildings, some

with open fronts and almost empty, while others, standing on short pillars, were tightly shut up and seemed scarcely larger than dolls' houses.

At first Eli was the only person in the precincts, but presently two porters carrying an empty litter came in. They were clad in mediæval looking garments of blue cotton boldly emblazoned with white, and had circular blue hats tied under their chins. They set down their load, washed their hands and their mouths at a spring near by where water ran from a bamboo pipe into a stone trough. Then they went together to one of the huts, bowed reverently, clapping their hands the while, after which they sat down on the step and began to smoke very much at their ease.

So this, thought Eli, must be one of the heathen temples which local preachers had been wont to describe as abodes of gross cruelty, wickedness, idolatry and superstition. He laughed to himself, the pictures had been so lurid and this reality was so mild. Even to breathe the air here gave one a sense of delicate and austere cleanliness that was not merely physical. It was only a momentary sensation, gone almost as soon as perceived, and since he was beginning to find the place rather empty and dull, he went on his way up the hill.

He soon struck into another road leading more directly from the port, and found a number of people going the same way as he. Presently through an opening in the wayside trees he saw the hill of the pink clouds just above him. The clouds were clouds of plum blossom clothing the dark, leafless branches of small trees which were set about a zig-zag path leading to a building on a terrace higher up the hill.

All among these orchards folk were wandering in twos and threes and little family parties. Eli noted a young soldier hand in hand with a tiny old grandmother, and

polite elderly men in groups of four or five. It was an orderly and cheerful crowd, composed chiefly of people of the lower class, neat and clean, in what were evidently their festival dresses.

Here and there were little platforms covered with matting or bright rugs, where for a farthing or so the holiday makers might rest and refresh themselves with tea. Eli tried some of this beverage and did not like it at all, and the neighbouring revellers laughed in a friendly fashion at his discomfiture. Away to the south was a view of the sea, and misty islands and mountains beyond, and all about was a murmur of gentle voices, a movement of quiet-coloured robes, the soft dragging of clogs, and now and again, the laughter of a child.

Eli saw a boy, apparently about fourteen years old, watching him very intently, who, when he moved on, made him a low bow and came and walked with him. The lad was sombrely and rather poorly dressed in some striped cotton fabric. He seemed to be thinking hard, and at last, with his head on one side, he began to speak very carefully and slowly.

"Good morning, sirs," he said, "if you plis I am spiking littu Engrish."

Eli was feeling sociable, so he said he was glad to hear it, and they did their best to exchange ideas, but it was uphill work. The boy frowned and seemed to be trying to read something inside his head each time he spoke, and perspiration beaded his forehead and his upper lip from the effort.

"Mister Foreign Gentermans viewing perlumpsu? Mani perlumpsu frowering in Engrand's?" he enquired with deep earnestness. He interchanged his l's and r's and seemed to add terminal vowels and swallow them again at the same instant, but Eli made out the drift of the question. Never having tasted the Japanese species;

he replied that plums were good to eat, not because he thought the remark an interesting one, but because he imagined it would be easy to understand, but the lad seemed distressed. He repeated the sentence over to himself in a devout-sounding whisper.

"Per-lump-suis-gootoo-eata," then he shook his head sadly, "Noh, I cannots understands it."

Eli was getting bored. He walked faster, but the boy also quickened his pace.

"Perlumpsu is . . ." he began again.

"Oh, perlumpsu be damned," said Eli, laughing, and ran two steps at a time up a flight of stone stairs leading to a terrace in front of the building.

This was evidently a temple too, but of a different kind from that in the grove below.

It seemed rather dark inside. Big pillars of unpainted wood ran up towards the dimness of the roof, and there was a dull shimmer of gold at the further end where stood an altar with ornaments upon it and tall vases of flowers on either side. Eli had looked into churches in foreign towns that had seemed much like this. He took off his cap and moved forward a step or two, when a little, bald-headed old man pattered after him and with many bows and odd hissings, addressed him in a low tone, pointing to Eli's feet. Something was amiss, he gathered, but as he did not understand what it was, he turned and went back to the terrace. There he found the boy waiting for him, who greeted him afresh with a bow and smile.

"Nippon—Noh . . . Japanis Churchi-Templu, Shaka Sama Churchi-Templu. Verri naice," he said, indicating the building and looking anxiously at his victim.

Eli tried silence this time, and walked along the terrace. The boy followed at a little distance with a perplexed air.

They were approaching another much smaller building standing at the top of a second flight of steps. The boy

trotted forward and then turned and beckoned to Eli, who followed idly, having nothing better to do.

The steps led to a stone platform flanked by tall bronze lanterns. There was no front to the building but a grille of metal work screened the opening. No one seemed near, but Eli was aware of a kind of low whining. Then he saw, close against one corner of the gate, a little old woman in a dark robe, half squatting, half kneeling, incredibly flat on the pavement. Her head and neck were swathed in a dull purple veil and she held a string of beads in her hand. She turned her head to look at Eli, and then went on with her prayer, if prayer it was.

"Nam' Am' 'Buts', Nam' Am' 'Buts', Nam' Am' 'Buts'," she was saying over and over again in her strange, squealing tones.

Eli drew nearer. Some paper pellets were sticking to the metal work of the gate, and a dark object was twined among the bars. With a little shock he recognised that it was a thick tress of some woman's hair.

"Nam' Am' 'Buts', Nam' Am' 'Buts'," the monotonous voice went on.

He approached the gate and peered through it, and as his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness within, found himself looking up into a great golden face.

The eyes were half closed, and the full lips set into a line of unearthly sweetness and calm. The figure, also golden, was seated in a strange attitude upon a round, flower-like throne, and a half-seen, branching tracery surrounded the whole as with a glory.

Eli's breath checked.

Once . . . somewhere . . . he had seen it all before. Where?

A great stillness seemed to radiate from that shining presence.

Then for a moment everything around him vanished,

and he was back in Bourne Church, caught up once again in that vision of his childhood, forgotten for how long.

He made a little movement with his hand, and it seemed to him that he could feel the worn gold of his grandmother's wedding ring slip along her finger beneath his touch, and his own childish voice was saying,

"I *did* see it, Grandmer."

And her voice answered,

"And those be the pure in heart, my lambie."

The pure in heart.

"Nam' Am' 'Buts'," "Nam' Am' 'Buts'," the whining voice was saying. As Eli turned away from the shrine the boy thought that the Mister Foreign Gentleman was smiling a strangely bitter little smile.

"Verri naice idolu," he remarked ingratiatingly after a pause, but to his surprise Eli turned upon him almost savagely.

"Look here, Tommy, you run home," he said.

He felt in his pocket and held out a coin with one hand while with the other he pointed down the hill. The lad took a step back. Though he did not understand the words, the tone and the gesture were unmistakable. His face stiffened and his arms fell forward a little as he made Eli a slight but ceremonious bow.

"Noh thanku," he said, and turning away went quietly down the steps.

Eli's heart smote him. Why should he have insulted this child?

He followed swiftly and overtook the lad on the terrace below.

"Stop a bit, sonny," he said.

The boy drew himself up.

"Japanis students beggars is not," he said softly, but his voice sounded like the tinkle of steel.

"I know. I'm sorry. Won't you shake hands?"

The boy hesitated. Eli's hand was still stretched out.

"Please," he said, and smiled down at the young face below him, and like still water suddenly rippled, the lad's face broke into beauty as he smiled in reply.

They shook hands, bowing to each other with much ceremony, and all the way back to the harbour Eli did laborious and Olendorffian penance for his discourtesy.

"Sirs, I thank you verri much, and I have the pleasures to wish you a verri naice good-bye," his young friend said as they parted.

"I — hope — you — will — make — progress — in — English," Eli replied in true copy book style.

"Perhaps if I studi verri earnestly, I shall be coming Engrands and Amelica bye and bye," the boy said, as a pious person speaks of going to heaven.

"Yes?" said Eli. "Why?"

"To gain moneys I will work much, even to sweeps house and gardens, and after perhapsu I will go to Paris Univlersitee."

"Good Lord!" said Eli, but hastily added, "And—after—that—what—will—you—do?"

"If you plis I will be Ambassador," said the boy.

Eli saw the little cotton-clad figure standing for a long time on the wharf, watching the native boat that was taking the visitor out to his ship in the bay.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON BOARD THE *James and Lucy*

A FORTNIGHT later Eli came hurriedly on deck. He was chasing the ship's cat who had somehow possessed herself of a bird. He cornered his quarry and rescued her prey, striving to soothe her outraged feelings with empty compliments.

The cat curved herself round his legs, blinking up into his face a moment, and then, fixing her late prize with a wide stare, twitched her tail. Eli examined the bird, it seemed to be some kind of small petrel. It had dark plumage and a frowsty and fishy smell. He did not think it was much hurt, only stunned, but it might drown if he threw it overboard in that state.

"Well?" said the cat, as plainly as if she had spoken, "why don't you put it down so that we may play with it together?"

"You be off, Topsy," Eli answered, shoving her away with his foot, and went to the galley where he borrowed a bit of old cabbage net, which he fastened loosely round the petrel, and going back to the fo'castle, hung the improvised hammock well out of Topsy's reach.

"Unsportsmanlike," said the cat, "also extremely unjust to ME. However, many things come to cats who wait," and jumping into Eli's berth she resumed her staring. Eli laughed and went on deck again.

It was the first dog-watch, and a slack time for most of the crew. The sun was setting among clouds behind the land they had left, and before them was the dim expanse

of the Pacific Ocean, grey and cold in the Spring twilight.

Men were sitting or lounging about, mostly Englishmen, but with one or two Scandinavians and North Germans among them. An old seaman (sailors are generally old men at fifty) was peering through a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, mending some of his spare clothing. A thin man with a pointed nose, who had been reading a book with a yellow cover, threw it aside and yawned. He was dark and had greyish eyes that always gave Eli an uncomfortable feeling that they had somehow been put in upside down. I fancy that his messmates found him rather an uncomfortable personality too, and there was a legend abroad that he "had been a gentleman once." If so, most of the symptoms had worn off by this time. He was called Wilkins, though he insisted that his name ought to be pronounced Vilikins, and feigned to be particular that it should be spelt with two small v's.

"Heard a bit of gossip at Yokohama," he said carelessly, "Gibbon's dead, and Macalister of the Black Buoy Company is coming on this board as Chairman."

Most of the men seemed uninterested, but the old sailor looked up. He knew some deal about the Black Buoy ships, and little to their credit.

"Then you'd best make the best o' what vittles you gets now," he growled.

"What d'ye mean?" asked another seaman who was standing near.

"If things on this ship is to be done Black Buoy fashion, 'twill be little more'n pound and pint after we gets to 'Frisco."

There was a buzz of consternation at this. Pound and pint or "the bare whack" meant the Board of Trade minimum and no extras—scarcely enough to keep body and soul together men said. 'Twas a bleak prospect.

There was further low-voiced discussion and dismal tales were told—and sworn to.

"Go on," exclaimed a cheerful youngster, "our old man's wings mayn't exactly be a-sproutin', but he won't do that."

The ex-gentleman picked up his book again.

"Our old man has a wife and six children the steward tells me, and a father of a family is capable of anything."

If the cynical quotation went unrecognised, the truth it contained can hardly have done so, at any rate by the elder mariners present. Nevertheless it shocked their sentimental souls to hear what they knew stated thus baldly.

The watch was all but over and the young optimist arose.

"Well," he said, "in 'Frisco anyway, if we don't like it we can kick up a dust. Three years and signing articles and such like's all right enough, but there's limits, says I, and if the worst comes to the worst . . ."

"There's always the crimps, thank Gawd," drawled Wilkins, finishing the sentence for him without looking up from his book.

"You've a thankful sperrit, my son," remarked the old sailor grimly. "You praise the Lord for that. You mightn't think it, but there's orf'cers an' owners goin' about as says as how godly contentment ain't none too common at sea."

Wilkins laughed. The speaker took off his spectacles, and tucking his mended raiment under his arm, vanished into the obscurity of the fo'castle as a beast goes into its lair.

Eli pondered these matters as he went about his work. He had been in San Francisco before and knew something of the ways of that port. Hitherto all had gone well on board. The food was not amiss, judged by the unexact-

ing standards of the sea. The Captain was just, if strict, and the first mate, though an American, had never man-handled any of the crew. More, a fair amount of pocket money had been advanced during the time the ship had lain in various harbours, and shore leave was not unreasonably withheld. Altogether the *James and Lucy* might be considered a "home ship," or at least she was in a fair way to be referred to as such in after days when her present crew should be serving on other craft. Now, however, some slight, rufflings were passing over the surface of life on board her. The "old man" had been "a bit nuggety," and, perhaps in consequence, the tempers of the other officers shorter than before. It might mean nothing. Eli was not sure. At any rate there was no need to trouble himself—yet.

He kept the middle watch that night. When it was over, and he was about to turn in, a slight fluttering and an indignant croak reminded him of his prisoner. He opened the net, and the bird, which appeared to have recovered, showed decided ill-humour. Eli went back on deck. The dawn was beginning to show in a pale greenish sky, and the morning star hung in a clear space between bands of slaty cloud. The dark water heaved lazily, and a vast melancholy seemed to brood over the empty circle of the sea, but far up aloft the curve of a sail caught a glimmer of light. Eli threw the bird outward over the ship's side and watched it flit away. He turned to go when a sailor, who had been standing near, whistling through his teeth while engaged in some task about the rigging, broke into song. His voice was a clear tenor, and Eli heard the words plainly.

"One is One and All Alone,

And ever . . . more shall be . . . so."

It was only a phrase set to some monotonous tune, but

as it ceased Eli's hand tightened on the net he was holding.

"What's that, Joe?" he said quietly.

"What's what?" asked the singer, looking up.

"What you was singing."

"That? Bit of a old chanty I heard when I was a kiddie. My dad use' ter sing it at home. Don't remember any more. Sort of religious wheeze, I fancy, 'bout twelve 'postles or sumpfin. He was took that way, now and agin, was old dad, and other times 'twas jus' the ex-ac contrary."

Eli went back to the fo'castle. The air tasted foul after the freshness on deck, but he turned in and slept as a sailor can.

Day after day the ship pursued her way eastward. The ~~sea~~ was calm and the wind steady, and all things on board seemed to have dropped into their accustomed routine. Now and then sail was altered, but not often. The crews of wind-jammers must learn to do this work in the dark as well as by daylight, and without aid from lanthorns. Eli had just come down from aloft one specially murky night, when he heard a scrap of conversation between the first and second mates that disturbed him, he scarcely knew why.

"I don't care. It's a rotten bad system then, and infernally unfair anyhow," the younger man was saying.

"Waal," answered the chief officer, "I bet you'll find it as I say. Business is business and if there's no freight, there isn't any, and that's all about it. Sentiment don't cut any ice, as you'll discover, young man, if you live long enough," and he went below.

Like all small communities shut away from the influence of the great tides of the outer world, a ship's crew becomes oddly sensitive to the ripples of unvoiced thought playing in the minds of its members. Before long it be-

came evident that Eli was not the only man on board to feel that things were not as they had been on the *James and Lucy*.

The sailors talked matters over watch by watch, and group by group, and came pretty close to guessing what the new manager's tactics would be should trade prove very slack when the ship reached San Francisco. That port was to have been the last place of call before sailing for Liverpool, which they had expected to reach by the expiration of the three years for which they had all signed on, a period which had yet some five months to run. Till the expiration of that term the men could not legally claim any part of their wages, but at the end of that time the Company would have to pay them off in full, with the exception of such sums as, by an act of grace, had been advanced to them during the voyage. On the other hand should the Company decide to lay the *James and Lucy* up in San Francisco Bay till freights were better, it would quite honestly be open to them to come to an arrangement with their men to terminate the contract by mutual consent, and then to ship a new crew only for the return voyage, as this would pay the owners better than keeping the present hands on doing nothing while the ship lay idle.

But here another consideration came in. Very considerable sums would be due to the men at present on board. If, for any reason, a man deserted, the whole of what was owing to him would be forfeited, nominally but only nominally, to the Board of Trade. For this reason dishonest owners often brought pressure on their crews to induce them to desert when ships were to lie up for any time, and were not ashamed to use crimps and other land sharks as their acknowledged agents in this form of robbery. Most of Eli's messmates were well acquainted with these facts, and also with the reputation of the Chairman

of the Black Buoy Company, and all agreed that however the crimps might blandish, or the owners screw, they would stick to the ship in a body till they were paid.

A group were discussing the matter in the fo'castle one day.

"Pretty fools we'd be to go," said one youngster, whose slow wits had only just mastered the explanations offered by his seniors. "Why, that 'ud be the very game they wants us ter play. I sees that clear enough."

"Got it at last, have you, Jimmy? You'll be a great man yet, give you time," said another sailor, while a third gave emphatic expression to uncharitable wishes with regard to the future of most persons and bodies maritime including himself for his folly in having become a sailor.

"After all, whatever they does, it'll be only a short while. I guess we can stick it that long," opined another lad.

"Aye, ye could," said the old sailor from his bunk, "but ye won't, not when the time comes."

They all protested, taking the heavenly and the infernal powers to witness that hold fast they would and could.

"Ye won't do it no better for swearin'," the old man answered sourly.

At this Wilkins began embroidering his declaration with such a filigree of fantastic profanity as to reduce most of his hearers to an admiring silence, but Eli caught an undertone in this display that caused him to look across at the speaker with a peculiar expression. The latter met his eye, brought his oration to a sulphurous finish, and putting his hand over his heart, bowed round to the circle, burlesqueing a singer acknowledging applause.

"Mr. William Blake will now favour us with his opinions on this burning subject," he said, and sat down.

Eli looked at the faces about him and his heart sank a little.

"My opinion is that the money we've earned belongs to us, and if we stick together we shall get it," he said.

"'Ear! 'Ear! 'Ear!" mocked Wilkins, "unity is strength. If at first you don't succeed, likewise Gawd bless our 'ome!"

The old seaman swung his legs over the side of his berth.

"Umph! most men's Gawd is their belly," he remarked, and dropped rather heavily to his feet.

Three days after that they made the American coast, but outside the Golden Gate the wind fell, and the *James and Lucy* had to lie to and wait for a tug. When she came she brought the Captain's mail and the owner Company's agent.

The men set to at their various tasks with a will. The sight of the shore worked in their blood like wine.

The *James and Lucy* was to lie out in the Bay waiting her turn at the wharf. It was not till the anchor was dropped that the agent came on deck again to take his departure. The Captain walked with him to the gangway, shook hands rather glumly, and then turned back, passing close to Eli. A ship's boy, running on an errand, slipped and fell, and the Captain swore at him savagely. A bad sign, Eli thought, for hitherto that had not been Captain Blackett's way.

Long ere this the ship had been surrounded by boats. Several members of the Seamen's Landlords' Association of San Francisco (*anglicé*, crimps) were already on board. They made no secret of their errand, and the officers took no notice of them. A Captain who discouraged crimping too zealously might find himself in straits, if for any reason he needed to ship extra hands or a crew.

The whole complex and nefarious trade had been so

organised, that, founded as it was upon the solid rocks of human greed and folly, the folly of those who leading hard lives, are ready to snatch a little pleasure at any cost, it seemed almost impossible to shatter it.

A good many of the crew of the *James and Lucy* had still a shilling or two in their pockets. They bought fresh food and green stuff eagerly, and availed themselves of such friendly opportunities to drink as the crimps offered, but no one accepted the invitation to desert, or appeared to heed the accounts of the lucrative jobs waiting for fugitive sailors so soon as they should set foot upon the quays.

The crimps were not discouraged however. They went home and bided their time. They understood the fluctuations of trade in the port, and their intelligence system with regard to skippers and owners was good and up-to-date. They knew very well when it would pay them to press hard and spend money, and also when to do nothing. In the case of the *James and Lucy* they did not think they would have long to wait before some paying business in the matter of "blood money" and "advance notes," and even other commissions fell into their hands, and they had every confidence in the power of the Black Buoy Company and their officers to make life unendurable for such members of the crew as might resist all other persuasion to desert.

CHAPTER XIX

AT THE WHARFSIDE

DURING the first fortnight after her arrival in port a little shore leave was given to the crew of the *James and Lucy*. It was granted grudgingly and a very small dole of pocket money with it. There was work to be done on board and the men could not yet be dispensed with, but when the ship lay at the wharf and the cargo was being disembarked by the stevedores, a young Norwegian returned on board drunk and somewhat noisy, and with this for excuse, all permission to land and all further advances were refused to the whole crew. The food grew worse, nothing more was left to spend on little luxuries, and the mates began to make work; but for a while, though the men grumbled and swore, they held fast to their determination to stay by the ship. Informal committee meetings were held in the fo'castle, and after a day or two Eli saw that some of the weaker brethren were already beginning to waver. A crimp had been on board again, but he was "playing very light" as yet.

Wilkins was in a specially irritating mood, and somehow diffused an atmosphere antagonistic to Eli and one or two other men who were supposed to be the stalwarts of the holdfast party.

Captain Blackett, when on board, shut himself up in his cabin as much as possible, and was evidently in a state of perpetual ill humour; and all day the sunshine of Spring gilded the walls and roofs of the town and at night the lamps beckoned and allured.

A few yards off across the quay was all that these sailors had longed for and dreamed of for many months; a land of pleasure and excitement, peopled with folk speaking their own tongue, a land stored with fresh, savoury food and flowing with strong drink. And these men had hard-earned money lying to their credit, and a record of good service behind them.

Now their employers were tacitly offering them a cruel choice: they might stay as unwanted prisoners on board, or go as penniless defaulters ashore. Even as an elderly man Eli could never speak of this injustice quite unmoved. He mentioned it to me more than once in the years when we were much together.

He and his two or three friends did their utmost to keep their messmates to the prudent course, but they felt that the tide was turning against them.

Then two lads slipped away for an unauthorised evening's frolic. Heavy fines were recorded against them, and an armed watcher from the shore was put on board at night. It was said that he had orders to shoot any man who left the ship, but it was also whispered that only the empty-handed would have cause to fear, and that any sailor taking his baggage with him might go unscathed, since it would be evident he did not mean to return.

The afternoon following, one or two crimps and their runners looked in for a friendly chat, and their conversation was all of jobs on land, jobs at high salaries and under pleasant conditions, near 'Frisco or up the coast.

Why, in the Province (as British Columbia was still called) folks were crazy to get men. The crimps knew for a fact that quite light work on the Canadian Pacific Railway was being paid for at the rate of five dollars a day and grub provided, and the C.P.R. was no slouch of an outfit and weren't mean about *that*, you bet, and it was work any decent young chap could do easy.

A thin man with a sandy goatee and a nervous twitch that went ill with his large benevolent manner and decorous city clothing, announced that if it were not for his wife and children he would try up that way himself. There wasn't much profit to be made out of keeping a boarding house for sailors, he said. Some men, if you could call them that, might make it stick, grinding the poor chaps down when they came ashore, they had all seen the sort of blood suckers that discounted advance notes the way everyone knew *was* done. For his part he wondered why things like that were allowed to crawl about, still, he supposed it took all sorts to make a world. But up at New Westminster now . . . etc., etc.

The runner in attendance agreed. Los Angeles was where he would like to try his luck. It was an aged mother kept him in 'Frisco. He was a dissipated-looking young Irishman, powerfully built, with a mop of dark hair curling under a soft black hat, and a hard, bright colour in his cheeks. There was something in his look and his way of backing up his chief that caused Eli to observe him rather closely. The runner seemed to feel the scrutiny, though he had turned away, he looked over his shoulder quickly, and his eyes met Eli's. The Irishman's red underlip bulged out a moment and a glassy look came into his grey eyes, the peculiar sign by which nature indicates one species of liar. He pulled himself together after a moment and embroidered his tale a little, but with an effort, and once when the crimp's back was turned Eli caught a gleam beneath the underling's eyelids as he looked towards his chief, that reminded the watcher of the shine on a knife he had seen half drawn in a street brawl at Lima soon after he took to the sea. Such odd little signals, forgotten for years and then recognised afresh, life is continually throwing out to us all, but most

of us are too slow to catch or too quick to forget the hints. Eli was not wont to be either.

Of course the sailors knew in their hearts that these actors were lying, and the purpose for which they lied. Nevertheless the little drama impressed them; there must be something in these tales of well-paid jobs ashore, they thought, there was no smoke without a fire, and the land was calling. If they went they would be out of this prison, and money was not everything. The boarding masters would give them a bit of a fling against their advance notes, and at the worst they could ship again on one craft or another. Eli guessed their thoughts and said something about being in England before long.

The crimp with the twitching face, Salmon by name, turned upon him, but very blandly. Didn't he know? Why, that was too bad. Sailor men were never told anything, however much the matter might concern them, but officers were all alike—English officers that was, they all thought their men were just dirt. Now in the U-nited States a man *was* a man, whether he was employer or employed, it was all one, he was taken for what he was worth, and a competent man—Eli was to understand him, a real competent man—with some get up and savvy, could . . . etc., etc.

But about this here business of going back to England—it might be done but 'twouldn't be on board the *James and Lucy*. No, sir. Why not? Well, because she was to be laid up right there. She'd pull out from the wharf the day after to-morrow, the stevedores would finish with her by that, she'd anchor out in the Bay a few days and then lie up at Oaklands Creek.

Mosquitoes? He should smile! Oaklands Creek mosquitoes had big families *and* took in summer boarders. Some said 'twas the flies that brought the fever, some said 'twas the smell, but he surmised that couldn't be as bad

for the health as was made out. Otherwise he didn't see how crews kept on board ships that lay up at the Creek could ever live to come out, but quite a number did, he'd known quite a few himself.

Leave ashore? Waal, he didn't know, of course, but the Black Buoy Company never seemed to hold with their men going ashore, a day once in three months maybe, but there was always chipping, or painting, or . . .

Oh! didn't they know that? Why, yes, that was all fixed up three months ago. The Black Buoy had amalgamated with Gibbon and Fratrison, and if old man Blackett didn't toe the mark, old man Blackett could go. He guessed it was Macalister would have the sayso now.

Most of the Scotch had a name for being mean, he'd heard say.

Was that so? Well, of course there was good and bad in every crowd, but he'd known Macalister back East. He wasn't *really* Scotch, Macalister, a Blue Nose, he believed, and if ever a man would skin a louse for the hide and tallow . . .

Wilkins smiled and looked across at Eli.

"You'll remember I said something of this kind after we left Yokohama, but I fancy Mr. Blake, here, thought I was a wee bit uncharitable," he said, drawling with the pinched vowels he affected when he specially wished to annoy.

He turned to Salmon.

"What time did you say we are leaving the wharf?"

"'Bout three o'clock day after to-morrow."

Wilkins administered an affectionate and approving pat to the crimp's shoulder.

"What I admire so much about you, Mr. Salmon, is the scope and accuracy of your information as to the arrangements our employers are about to make for the comfort of us simple mariners. Are you at all likely to

be on the quay about two-thirty on Thursday, just to wave us good-bye? Yes? Then I shall trust to have the pleasure of seeing you."

He strolled away and Salmon looked after him, his nose twitching uneasily but with hope in his eyes.

The crimp had a little conversation in a kind of Teutonic pidgin English with one or two of the Scandinavian and North German sailors, then he and his runner departed, Salmon beaming with especial benevolence upon Eli while bidding him farewell.

"To-day's Toosday," said the ancient seaman to no one in particular, "the grub's not much to boast of now, but it ain't the bare whack yet. That'll begin maybe Saturday night, maybe Sunday morning."

Salmon proved a true prophet. The stevedores left the *James and Lucy* the next day, and preparations were made to take the ship out to her anchorage. A good many craft were already laid up around the shores of the Bay, in the creeks and up the river, for trade was becoming slack, but one or two large vessels were getting ready to sail immediately, and it was probably to meet their need of men that the crimps had attacked the *James and Lucy*. With regard to the future of the latter the gossip of the wharves also bore out the crimp's prognostications; it was pretty evident that she would not return to England at the end of the three years. In the meantime the owners were under no legal obligation to grant either shore leave, pocket money or food beyond the Board of Trade minimum. If the men stayed by the ship till the end of their term it meant imprisonment for nearly five months, with hard labour and ill usage, if they deserted all wages would be forfeited. By holding together it was just possible that they might force the company to pay them off in order to save further expense, but it was an uncertain and cheerless prospect, and

even then they would be left in a foreign land, obliged either to live on their earnings till they could ship again, or find their way home at their own charges.

A big Schleswiger summed up the situation.

"Der owners haf god us in a cleft schtick und no mistake," he said.

Eli set his jaw. He meant to have his money whatever it might cost him in personal comfort, but it was becoming evident that few others would back him; even the stalwarts were beginning to look glum.

On Thursday he was at work on deck. Captain Blackett was standing near him speaking to the first mate when Salmon was seen strolling along the wharf. He looked up and caught the mate's eye, but no sign of recognition passed between the two.

Presently Wilkins went into the fo'castle, and shortly after emerged again dragging his baggage. A hulking Swede and two or three English sailors followed him, and going to the side they all threw their rolls down on the quay.

At the sound the Captain turned. The other sailors sprang over the side, and picking up their belongings, made off towards Salmon, but Wilkins lingered a moment.

"Good-bye, Captain," he said insolently, "many thanks for a pleasant voyage, and kind regards to Macalister when you meet him."

He swung his legs over the side and dropped to land; then, as though remembering something, he turned.

"Oh, about that thirty pounds I'm leaving," he called back, "you might spend it on some trifle for Mrs. B. and the children with my love. You can keep the change yourself."

A shout of derisive laughter went up from the other deserters, and Salmon was seen making deprecating ges-

tures as the group vanished among the drays and wag-gons crowding the entrances to the warehouses along the quay.

The Captain had feigned not to see or hear, but Eli caught a glimpse of his face.

Truly the cup of humiliation the Black Buoy Company had brewed for their officer was a pretty bitter one. And it was not all drunk yet.

The departure of Wilkins and his satellites had cleared the air a little, and the men decided that the situation must be faced.

They appointed Eli and the chanty singer, Joe Dalby, to put forward a request that shore leave might be granted as heretofore during the voyage, together with an allowance of pocket money. If the latter was refused the delegates were instructed to "ask for a tailor."

The appointment of tailors to ships' crews was, Eli told me, governed by a system of brigandage nearly as complicated and well established as crimping. The outcome of it being that sailors could obtain from this licensed robber not only clothes but drink, and also small loans of money, but at a most ruinous rate of interest, while the tailor's repayment was fully assured by the ship owners, less commissions to all sorts of surprising people.

If the requests made by the men were not granted, it would be tantamount to an admission that the Company was about to try the method known as "running out," and the matter would resolve itself into a contest of endurance.

The deputation was received on Saturday morning, and all their requests curtly refused. The ship anchored in the Bay that afternoon, and on Sunday it was "pound and pint" for the crew.

CHAPTER XX

IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY

ON Tuesday shortly before mid-day Salmon and his runner paid another visit to the *James and Lucy*. The runner remained in the boat whilst the crimp came on board and entered the fo'castle as the men were finishing their meagre dinner. Some of the crew were in their bunks, some gathered round the visitor, others looked in from the deck.

"Say, boys," Salmon began. "The hash on this ship seems a bit slim to-day. What's the reason?"

Eli looked at him squarely.

"I fancy you could tell us that better than we can tell you," he said.

"There don't seem to me to *be* no reason in treating folks so," the crimp replied soothingly, "but I told you what I thought of Macalister last time I seen you all. What I don't see is why you boys sticks it. I call it a shame, that's what I call it."

(But he did not merely call it that.)

Then he began the old story about jobs ashore. After a while he felt that the atmosphere was unsympathetic, and ceased. He looked round, then searched in his pocket. (Though the day was warm and sunny he wore a voluminous overcoat.) Taking out a big cigar case he handed it to Eli, who refused, but the other sailors were not above a smoke at a crimp's expense, and crowded in to partake of his largesse.

"Lord! I'm suffering for a drink!" the benevolent one

remarked when his audience were puffing contentedly. "Say, boys, got a pannikin handy?"

He pulled a bottle of whiskey out of another pocket, mixed himself a draught and passed the bottle round.

The men drank, laughing, but their resistance to blandishment remained unshaken. It was time to play a bolder game.

Salmon ranged up to Eli and made him a direct and perhaps *bona fide* offer of a job on a ranche, giving the name and address of the owner, and to show the genuine nature of the proposition, also offered twenty dollars advance on the first month's pay. He spoke in a low voice, pretending that he wished the proposal to be confidential, but he knew the other men could not help but hear. He took the notes, counting them ostentatiously, and held them out to Eli who merely shook his head.

Salmon was honestly astounded; if a hungry cat had refused fish it would hardly have surprised him more. Twenty crackling dollars, and refused by a sailor on the bare whack!

His temper began to fail a little; he had spent time and trouble upon these ingrates, there was no more whiskey left in the bottle, and the drink seemed only to have made the men inclined to play with Salmon instead of allowing him to manage them.

He looked round the fo'castle, and a man laughed.

"Well, if this crowd's such a set of fatheads that they can't see it's a good offer I'm making, 'tisin't my fault," he said pettishly; then restraining himself, he continued, "I don't say as I ain't sorry. I am, for some friends of mine are on to a big job or two, and want a couple of dozen good men pretty badly, sailors for choice. I knowed the *James and Lucy* had the name of havin' a smart crew on board, so I came to you first, but there's other ships about, and I guess I'll not have long to wait. I ain't one

to bear malice. If you folks likes the Black Buoy grub and bein' Macalister's lick-spittles, 'tisin't for me to complain. But I guess you'll all think of old Salmon when you're stuck good and tight in Oaklands Creek. However, that's all one to me. We'll have another drink and then I'll be moving. I guess 'tis the last taste o' liquor you boys'll get for quite a while. The Black Buoy don't go none on grog. Stric' teetotal they are, s'far's their men is concerned. Well cold water's good for the hands and complexion."

His eyes roved from face to face, trying to pierce the dimness to see the effect of his words.

"I'm glad I've got a bottle of real good stuff left though," his voice fell to a regretful tone, "I meant for us to drink it to the success of a bargain, but since that's off, we'll drink it all the same. There's nothing mean about me. Here, boy, my boat's along side. You cut along and ask O'Brien for that bottle of Scotch. The number three, mind. I left it under the thwart."

Even on a bright Spring day the fo'castle was so dark that a lanthorn was kept burning, and as Salmon moved to let the boy pass him, the light fell full upon his face and hands. The fingers twitched nervously and the usually blinking eyes were set in a wide stare as the crimp looked hard at a group opposite him.

Topsy jumped down from a berth and went out, following the boy. Eli thought that he had seen Topsy look very like Salmon, not long ago, the night he had left her staring at the imprisoned petrel.

Salmon's voice, too, lingered in his ears.

"Scotch, the number three, mind!"

Eli minded.

The boy came back with the bottle. Salmon moved it to the light a moment, glanced sharply at the label, uncorked it, and offered it to Eli.

"After you, Mr. Salmon," said the latter politely.

The crimp gave him an odd look, then put the bottle to his lips, and threw back his head. He wore a turn down collar, and the Adam's apple of his throat threw a sharp shadow—which never moved.

He gave the bottle once more to Eli, who held it up against the lanthorn. It was still quite full.

At that a fire which had long been smouldering within him flared suddenly into a white and blinding flame.

"This stuff is drugged," he said, not loudly, but at the tone a dead silence fell on the assemblage.

The crimp gave a quick look behind him and a little involuntary movement, but obeying a jerk of the head from Eli, a small Irishman shouldered a bigger neighbour, and together they blocked the exit and with it the whole of the daylight.

Salmon stuttered and then began to scold. He looked round upon a ring of half seen forms. Eyes shone out of dark places, and triangular patches of lamplight showed here a nose and there a chin, and one red, hairy fist resting on a blue-clad knee.

Worst of all, no one moved or spoke, but fully lit before him stood the figure of Eli holding the bottle.

Salmon's nerve was going. His voice, which had mounted note by note, broke on a kind of cracked scream, and ceased.

It was the nightmare quality of it all that mastered him.

These creatures that he had been wont to drive "like turkeys with a stick and red clout"—these seamen—he had often known them violent enough, but under circumstances when by reason of his superior cunning their struggles did but deliver them the more completely into his power.

Now they had turned upon him. They had him in their

lair, shut in, covered over in this darksome place, alone.

May we not spare a little pity for an animal whose appointed prey, by some monstrous perversion of Nature, has become the aggressor, for a spider caught by flies?

But it was a hazy remembrance of an oleograph of Daniel in the den of lions that floated with symbolical significance through Salmon's mind.

He had a desperate instinct that even now all might be well if it were not for this fiend incarnate with the white face, who had brought things to such an incredible pass. Salmon's hand stole behind him, as with lips working silently, he looked up at Eli.

It was in vain. Hands thrust out of the obscurity caught his hands, hands pawed his raiment, and then something heavy clattered and slithered along the deck, and a rough voice grunted approval.

Eli pointed to the pannikin from which the crimp had drunk his first tot. Someone reached out and gave it to the avenger, who poured therein a strong dose from the glug-glugging bottle.

"If t' stoof's ahl raight ye can drink it, mister," said a North country voice near by, and there was a sound of laughter worse than curses to Salmon's ear.

Suddenly Eli reached out a long arm, proffering the cup.

The crimp backed, his hands crooked and shaking, but he felt men even in the bunks behind him.

There was a moment's pause and then at last Eli spoke.

"Drink, you swine!" was all he said, but at the sound and look of him Salmon took the cup, then hesitated.

"Drink!" said Eli again, and hurriedly and as one bereft of volition, Salmon drank, and stood with the pannikin dangling limply from his hand, looking at Eli.

At that the men moved, laughing, from the entrance, daylight came in once more, and with it a fresh and

dancing air. A line of blue and the sunny headlands of the Bay could be seen outside.

The crimp drew the back of his hand across his damp brow.

"Thish here's a pretty mean trick to play down on a . . . on a free American citizen," he said, and looked around. Then he made a step towards the outer deck, and halted, swaying a little. "I'll be damned if I'll ever do a hand's turn to help a sailor agin. I'll . . . I'll . . ." he began to swear a little plaintively, then stopped, and his eye lit on Eli.

"*You'll* smart for this, you long-nosed devil," he broke out furiously. "D'ye think I dunno all 'bout *you*? The owners'll see me put right, if Blackett won't. I'll hev' the hide off'n you, sure as my name's . . . my name's what it is, I'll make you sorry you was born. Thinks you can git the better o' me, do ye? Thinks you can interfere 'tween . . . off'cers an' men? You ———!" His voice tailed off and he began groping in his clothing. "Say! has any of you boys a-seen my gun?" he said, with a sudden puzzled mildness. "Fancy I heard it fall somewheres." He looked round vaguely, and staggered.

"Give him air, Dutchy," a man said. "He's got it good. Knock-out drops he's had, an' no mistake. Bill was right there."

"'Ere, mister," said another coaxingly, drawing the crimp out on deck as he spoke. "You sit down a bit. You'll be better soon."

The sight of a drunken man went straight to their British hearts, and they began to tend their enemy, though he snarled at them.

"Think I don't know 'bout *you*, set o' stinking swabs? Look a-here. I've got you all down, *all* of you. Un-nerstan'?"

He fumbled out a pocket book, and taking a paper from it, waggled it feebly. Then he dropped it and his head fell forward.

A man propped him comfortably.

"He'll sleep it off," he said. "We got the best o' that bout, I fancy."

The sailors were all as pleased as children with the adventure.

"Called Bill a ———! he did," a third man said, and laughed boisterously.

"Lord, he swigged it down like a baby, didn't seem to mind much when the time came."

"Booze is booze these 'ard times," a Cockney remarked meditatively.

Eli set down the bottle and picked up the document Salmon had proffered him. As he did so he caught sight of his own name, William Blake.

It was written on official-looking paper. He opened out the sheet and saw that it contained a full list of the crew, with the exception of Wilkins and the other deserters, giving the wages owing to each man, with the amounts to be deducted for advances. It was evidently part of a letter, for the bottom of the sheet bore the words "trust this information will be a guide to you. Re the matter of commission we can discuss it when . . ." The beginning and end of the communication were missing.

Eli thought a moment. No one who had not access to the ship's books could have drawn up that list. The whole thing was not a pretty story, and even the Black Buoy Company might not care to have it made public. The Consul could perhaps be invoked, and with this paper and the drugged whiskey to produce something might be done to obtain justice for himself and the remaining members of the crew.

The situation, however, would require careful handling, and Eli recognised that his messmates would be of little assistance to him in formulating a plan.

Meanwhile Salmon's breathing was becoming stertorous.

"Look here," said Eli, "I think that chap O'Brien had better come and look after his boss."

The other men agreed and Eli went aft to fetch the runner, taking the paper with him.

CHAPTER XXI

ELI COMES BY HIS OWN

"Listen to a man's words, and look at the pupil of his eye, and he cannot long conceal his character from you."

—MENCIUS.

THE companion ladder was out aft, and Salmon's boat was moored to it. O'Brien lay at ease therein, smoking.

"Salmon's sick," said Eli. "You'd best come and see to him."

"Sick?" said O'Brien incredulously. Then he sat up.

"Have your crowd been doing anything to him?" he asked eagerly.

Eli considered a moment, watching him.

"Depends a bit on how you look at things," he said.

"Haow?"

"We invited him to drink some of his own whiskey."

O'Brien stared.

"You invited . . . d'ye mean that last bottle?"

"The number three," said Eli.

O'Brien's mouth fell open.

"An' he did?"

Eli nodded.

The Irishman threw back his head and laughed, his white teeth flashing.

"Bully for you! Oh, bully for you! But how did you fool him into doing that?"

"We didn't," Eli answered. "He knew well enough what he was drinking."

"Why . . . what the hell did he do it for then?"

"Because I told him to," Eli said in a soft level tone.

The laughter faded from the runner's face as he stared up at the speaker above him.

The latter stepped into the boat and loosed the painter.

"Push off a moment. I want to speak to you alone," he said.

O'Brien obeyed, and the boat drifted under the stern, where it was out of sight from the forepart of the vessel. Eli never took his eyes from the runner, who after a while began to fidget.

"You're no friend to Salmon," Eli said at last.

O'Brien started.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked.

"What I say."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't think. I know," said Eli.

"O'Brien shifted his position."

"You think you know a lot," he said, after a pause.

"I know that and a bit more too," Eli answered. "I know Salmon's had you on a string, and it's a string you'd like to see broken."

"He's a damned rascal, by the holy Mike, he is," O'Brien broke out, flushing. "Why wouldn't I hate 'um?"

Eli said nothing.

"I wisht I could see 'um frying in hell. I wisht . . ."

"Look here," said Eli, cutting him short, "if you want to get back a bit of your own, I can help you, but you've got to help me first. Salmon's up there, drugged. I'll tell you more presently. Maybe I'll want a letter taken ashore, maybe I'll want to go ashore myself, maybe others

will too. Can't tell yet for certain. How long'll that stuff keep Salmon quiet?"

"How much has he had?"

"A pretty good dose, half a tumbler full or more—neat."

"Salmon ain't got anything to call a head for drink. He'll lie quiet enough till night, then I guess he'll rave round a bit."

"Very well. Come and look after him now. Make a business of it till I'm ready. When I've done what I want, I'll see he gets put into the boat all safe, and when he's on shore you can do what you please with him."

"Why, what *would* I do with him?" O'Brien said stupidly.

Eli laughed.

"What do I care? Sell him drunk aboard a windjammer. Shanghai him same as he's done to many a poor sailor. That would be eight pounds in your pocket anyway."

"By Gosh!" O'Brien said, and then checked himself and fell silent.

They paddled back to the companion ladder, made fast, and went on deck, and the second officer who was on duty, turned away, pretending not to see them.

As Eli went forward he became aware of a commotion among the men he had left gathered around the prostrate crimp. Shouting and singing were going on, and presently men came out on deck, carrying or dragging long bags. They moved like disturbed ants hurrying to save their cocoons.

Eli looked over the side and saw another boat, a large one, with a coloured man at the oars. It had approached the ship unperceived by Eli while he was talking to O'Brien.

Another man followed and another. Their eyes were

glazed, the faces of some were flushed, others showed a kind of greenish pallor under their tan. Joe Dalby was among them.

"Hullo, Bill! Look sharp and get your stuff," he cried in excited tones as he passed. "We're on to the right chap this time, and no mistake. Hurroo!"

As he spoke, two strangers came out of the fo'castle, dragging several bags in haste.

O'Brien laughed.

"That's Miller," he said. "Smart man, Miller. He's got the bulge on Salmon this time, and with Salmon's own stuff too. Look here!"

He picked up the bottle of number three. It had been moved from the safe place where Eli had left it, and was lying on its side, empty.

Sick anger and a helpless sense of fate filled Eli's soul. The situation spoke for itself. No sooner was his back turned than the men had yielded to the temptation of the liquor, though they knew it to be drugged. Shared among the crew it had only sufficed to bemuse and excite them as Salmon had intended. The opportune arrival of Miller had done the rest.

How was it possible to fight against such folly? How help or be helped by those so utterly heedless of their own interests? It was hopeless.

He watched these messmates of his go past him and over the side, and knew that here again he must play his hand alone.

The heavily laden boat pulled away. O'Brien was sitting near Salmon, swinging his legs as he looked down on his helpless chief.

"Wait a bit," said Eli.

He went into the fo'castle, got out a coat, slipped the letter into a pocket and returning, spread the garment rugwise over Salmon.

"That'll be better," he said to O'Brien.

At that moment Evans, the old seaman, came out of the fo'castle. Through all the confusion he had lain quiet in his bunk. He looked sourly at Eli.

"So you're here still," he said.

Eli drew him aside.

"I did my best to get them to stop, but they couldn't keep off the drink, not even that doctored stuff, not even for ten minutes. I'm done with them, but I think I'll get my money. If you like to stand in, I believe we'll both get paid off—now."

Evans waved him aside.

"I've got nothin' to do with that," he said. "I stay by this ship. I signed on fer this ship, an' I goes home on this ship, if so be as she goes home, an' if not, stayin' in 'arbour is good enough for me. As fer you, you'll end up no richer nor what you begun, I reckon."

He turned away and Eli went straight to the Captain's cabin and knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Blackett, and Eli took off his cap and entered.

"What the devil . . ." the Captain began. Then he changed his phrase. "What was all that noise I heard just now?"

"The crew have left the ship, sir."

"All of them?"

"All except Evans, I believe, sir."

"Well, what's it to do with you? Why didn't you report to the officer on duty?"

"Mr. Simpson saw them go, sir," Eli answered.

The Captain snorted.

"Well then, you can go too. You can follow the crew for all I care."

"Very good, sir," said Eli. "When would it be convenient to pay me off?"

The Captain glared at him but he did not answer. It would not be convenient to pay any sailor off. The Company had intimated that pretty plainly, but Blackett did not see how he was going to expound their views to a man who had earned his money.

"You know as well as I do your pay's not due for five months yet," he said at last.

"Yes, sir," Eli replied, "but I understood that while the ship's laid up you would not be wanting a crew."

Captain Blackett was unaccustomed to discussing affairs in this tone with an A.B. It seemed to him outrageous, but Eli was perfectly respectful, and as the Captain knew, had right on his side. For his own part Blackett hated the ignominious rôle he had to play in this shabby business, and that made for weakness on his side.

"I'm quite willing to stay by the ship, sir, if you wish," Eli concluded.

"I don't care a damn whether you go or stay, you won't get paid before your time's up. Do you hear?"

The Captain growled fiercely, but his gruffness was not as impressive as of old.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he added as Eli did not move.

"There's a man called Salmon abroad, sir. He's very drunk. I think you ought to know he has been showing a paper about among the men before they left."

The Captain who had been moving restlessly, became still.

"It was part of a letter, sir."

Captain Blackett blew suddenly rather like a porpoise.

"It gave a list of all our wages and allowances," concluded Eli, and there fell a silence in the cabin.

"Do you say this man Salmon is aboard now?" asked the Captain at last, in a flatter tone of voice, which he still tried to make authoritative.

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"On deck, sir, by the fo'castle."

"Has he got this precious letter?"

"No, sir."

"Have you got it?"

"No, sir, but I know where it is."

"Can you get it?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

Eli looked straight into the Captain's eyes.

"I don't know, sir—yet."

Captain Blackett began to tramp up and down. His step was heavy, and he frowned. Eli, holding his cap, stood quietly by the door.

"You're a damned sea lawyer, that's what you are," the Captain broke out at last. "I don't want a man like you aboard when I ship a fresh crew."

Eli was silent.

"Go and get your blasted dunnage and be off with you, and take your drunken friend along. Come back and sign your receipt before you leave. I'd rather pay twice the amount to get rid of you. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," said Eli, and went.

He packed his belongings into his bag, stowed it away in the boat, and he and O'Brien got the unconscious Salmon into her also.

Then Eli went back to the cabin, taking the letter and his seaman's papers. The latter he handed to Captain Blackett who scribbled the customary V.G. as a testimony to character, then he pushed them and a cheque and another paper towards Eli, bidding him shortly to sign the latter.

Eli looked it over. Four months' pay already earned, had been deducted "for expenses."

This was sometimes done in the rare cases of termination of agreement by consent, but Eli was in no mood to suffer the exaction now.

"I make it ten pounds more, sir," he said.

"I'm not going to pay a man off at two pounds ten a month, to engage another at four pounds for the homeward voyage, and you needn't think it," the Captain blustered, amazed at Eli's temerity.

"It wasn't my wish to leave the ship, sir," the latter answered quietly.

He smoothed out the letter as he spoke, and prepared to put it among his other papers.

It was a pitiful and sordid haggle between two brave and naturally honest men that it makes one sick to think of.

Captain Blackett did not alter the paper but took the extra amount in American dollars out of his own purse and pushed it over to Eli in silence, and in silence Eli signed the receipt.

Then he placed that and the letter together on the table and the eyes of the two seamen met.

"Thank you, sir," said Eli.

He was not wearing his cap, but he touched his forehead in a respectful salute as he went out.

He had been mistaken in supposing that Evans was the only one of his late companions left on board. The cook and the Captain's steward, functionaries for whom the bare whack had of course no terrors, and who had their own methods of obtaining shore leave, were on deck, and bade him good-bye. The old seaman omitted that formality. The last view Eli had of him shewed him sitting on the deck with a large needle in his mouth, holding up a grey sock to the light and peering at the holes in it through his horn-rimmed glasses.

CHAPTER XXII

ELI GOES ASHORE

SALMON was still snoring as Eli and O'Brien rowed the boat across the Bay in the hot afternoon sunshine.

They passed near the *Alsatian*, a big windjammer making ready to go out with the next tide.

O'Brien asked Eli to wait for him while he went aboard. He had a message to deliver, he said. He came back wiping his lips and smiling, and he laughed softly to himself once or twice on their way to the shore, but Eli paid small heed to him.

They rowed down the long waterfront to an old wharf much out of repair, where, the runner said, Salmon rented a kind of hut which he used as an office. O'Brien took a bunch of keys from his chief's pocket, and he and Eli bore the drugged man into the refuge.

Eli had no mind to carry the wallet that held his wages about the slums of San Francisco longer than he could help, besides, he thought it prudent to cash his cheque without delay. He had learned something more of business methods than is common in his class during one of his voyages on a liner, when owing to an accident which had lamed him for some weeks, the purser had found him some odd jobs in the office.

"What are you going to do with that chap?" he said, nodding at Salmon, who was now lying on the floor with a pile of papers for a pillow.

"Let him sleep an hour or two longer," O'Brien an-

swered, "and then get a shay of some sort and tote him home. What are you going to do?"

"I want to go up town. Can I change here?"

O'Brien nodded.

"Sure you can."

Eli dressed himself in Sunday rig and packed his working clothes into the bag. It contained nothing of much value, and time pressed if he was to reach the business quarter before the banks closed.

"Look here," he said to O'Brien, "I want you to take my dunnage with you when you go. Give me the address and I'll call round later. Maybe I'll doss at your place to-night."

O'Brien laughed aloud.

"My, yes! there'll be room for you, I guess. Come when you want to. The bag'll be there by supper time at latest."

"Maybe I'll be later than that."

"As you please. Someone's sure to be about. Well, so long."

He flashed his teeth at Eli as the latter turned to go.

Eli reached the bank just in time, and deposited his store with the exception of some dollars for immediate needs, and then wandered forth with the whole town before him, master of himself and some thirty-five pounds to boot.

His first thought was for food. He would for once have a royal meal. He lingered over it and thought at first that no victuals had ever tasted so good, but to feast alone is, after all, a somewhat dreary business.

Having finished, he strolled out and presently found an open space on a hill overlooking the Bay.

The sun was setting and all the western sky was a glow of gold, reflected in the quiet waters.

He sat there a long while watching the sea. For over

ten years now he had wandered the ocean highways. He had sailed by many shores and put in at many ports. He had faced danger and hardship, he had roistered and known hunger and bodily pain, made friends and enemies. Now all those years were behind him, and his youth also, and before him lay—what?

He sat there alone in the prime of his age, in a foreign land, and it seemed to him that without his will another leaf in the book of his life was being slowly turned over by invisible fingers.

Soon the blank page would lie open before him and the record of his young manhood would have closed as the record of his earlier years had closed when he turned, heartsick, to smile farewell at the painted girl who had befriended him upon the Southampton quay.

A sharp pang, as of physical pain, a stir of the life-sorrow he had fled from and striven to kill, woke him from his dreaming.

It frightened him. Was the old enemy, grief, still there at his heart?

He rose to his feet, his breath coming unevenly, and fought it into quiescence once more.

Night had fallen by this and the lamps of the town lay sparkling along the edge of the Bay. Out on the water the lights of the shipping shown on the darkness of the sea like stars.

Somewhere among them the *James and Lucy* lay at anchor, her fo'castle empty now of the men who had been his messmates. They were down amid the town lights, doubtless snatching a brief taste of riot before the sea claimed them again.

Pleasure, they called it, and he had been wont to call it so himself, the glare and the noise, the coarse jests and the society of shameless companions. As he thought of it

all a waft as of stale liquor seemed to taint the pure night air around him till he sickened at it.

What had happened to him, he wondered?

He turned inland and walked far into the night.

It was nearly twelve before he reached Salmon's boarding house. It stood in a badly lighted street of wooden houses in a disreputable quarter of the town. Dim lights showed from many of the doorways, and a drunken sailor, piloted by a woman, turned in at the house next to the one he sought.

A wizened-looking boy opened the door to him and led him into a kind of bar.

Though the evening was mild, a stove was burning, benches and wooden rocking-chairs were scattered about, and down the centre of the room ran a table covered with a dirty white cloth and decorated with blue glass vases filled with dishevelled paper flowers.

Against one wall were bunks; except for the boy the place was empty. It was lit by glaring lamps hanging from the ceiling and smelt of coal oil and sawdust and stale tobacco.

"Whatcher want?" said the boy with admirable directness.

"I want O'Brien," Eli answered. "Is he in?"

"No, he ain't," the boy replied shortly, his sharp, furtive eyes scrutinising the visitor.

"Didn't he leave a bag for me when he came in with Salmon?"

The boy looked puzzled.

"Name of Blake?" he queried at last.

"That's me," said Eli.

The boy jerked his head towards one of the bunks within which a bag was discernible.

"I told O'Brien I'd sleep here to-night. Can you give me a room?"

"You can turn in here, I guess."

"Well, I guess I'm not going to. I want a proper bed with sheets, my son, and if you can't provide it I'm going elsewhere. Didn't O'Brien tell you I was coming?"

The boy looked worried but did not answer.

"Where's Salmon anyway?"

The boy shook his head.

Eli looked round, then he went over to the bunk and pulled out his bag. It felt nearly empty. He opened it and looked inside. His working clothes and oilskins were gone, also a pilot coat and some underclothing, merely a raffle of odds and ends remained.

The boy saw his face and slipped towards the door, but Eli was too quick for him. The child winced, and putting up his arm as if expecting a blow, he began to cry.

"Now see here, youngster," Eli said firmly, "you know more than you've told me. Nothing'll happen to you if you answer me straight. Did O'Brien bring this bag here? Stop crying and tell me."

"Yes, he did," the boy snuffled, "an' 'twas just as 'tis now. I never touched it. Wish I may drop if I did!"

He began to swear in his thin voice between his gulps, till Eli stopped him, and drawing him towards the stove, sat down and put his arm about this unlovely imp. He was sorry for the forlorn creature growing up amid such surroundings.

"Is there no one here but you, Tommy?" he asked.

The kind tone seemed to loosen the boy's tongue.

No, there was no one. There had been two sailors in a further room and one locked upstairs. Good and drunk they were, and O'Brien had taken them off in a cart with the help of two strange toughs. He'd have put them on board the *Alsatian*, he guessed. She was sailing that night—short-handed. O'Brien had said so, and they'd be glad to have this lot.

The boy spoke of sailors as a butcher's child might have talked of beeves.

Salmon hadn't been in since morning, he continued, and Rebecca had taken her boxes and said she was going to stay with her sister at Portland, Oregon, but the boy guessed there was something crooked about that—he had seen her wink at O'Brien when she said it. He had told Salmon once there was something up between her and O'Brien, and then there had been the hell of a row, and O'Brien had threatened to kill the speaker for splitting. Rebecca was a bad one, and he had told Salmon so, and Salmon had cursed and hit Rebecca one day, and she said she would do for him before she had finished, and now she'd gone, and O'Brien too, and he guessed they had done Salmon in somehow or another, and Salmon had always been pretty good to him, and the place was empty and he was frightened.

Eli thought awhile.

"Did O'Brien say nothing more?" he asked.

"He was a bit in drink, and talked and laughed a lot when he came in," the boy answered. "Yes, he did say sumfin' about telling a long-nosed guy that he'd taken his advice. I suppose he must have meant you, mister," the boy added ingenuously. "Said somefin' 'bout a shave and a bottle o' hair dye," he continued, "an' 'bout paying off a long score at last, an' he said he'd never set foot in this blasted town again. He had the keys, too. Said Salmon had a-told him to get sumpfin' outen the safe. I didn't half like it, I tell you, an' I don't know what's up nor what ter do, nor nuffin'," he concluded, as the tears began to well afresh.

As he spoke a light suddenly dawned upon Eli. His own careless words came back to him.

"Sell him drunk aboard a wind-jammer. Shanghai him—that would be eight pounds in your pocket anyway,"

and then the runner's exclamation and his laughter later.

Unless Eli was greatly mistaken, Salmon the biter was by this time bit, and with darkened hair, and dressed in Eli's clothes, was waking from his drugged slumbers to find himself locked up fast and safe upon the *Alsatian*, then standing out to sea. It was also probable that the money of his advance note (kindly signed for him by a "tough") together with that on the notes of the three drunken sailors, and the contents of Salmon's safe, were taking O'Brien, and doubtless Rebecca, to other spheres of usefulness far from San Francisco.

Eli laughed aloud. He could not help it. But he was surprised to find how little pleasure the thought of the justice meted out to his adversary gave him. He was even rather glad O'Brien had not tried to enlist his aid, for he might then have felt inclined to help on this dramatic revenge, whereas now his hands were clean of the whole dirty business. Upon which he laughed again till the boy asked him if anything was the matter.

Eli told him that Salmon had probably gone on a journey, and having learnt from the youngster that he had a mother—some relation of Salmon's—who lived just outside the town, he advised him to go to her in the morning.

Meanwhile he found a fairly tidy room upstairs, where he and the boy, who was afraid to sleep alone, made themselves a couple of shakedown for what remained of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NIGHT IN THE BOARDING HOUSE

"For lack of stars time had gone ill with me
Astray and blinded by the Mists that cling
About the Marshes, but that suddenly
I heard the Hillside Aspens whispering."
—OTA DOKWAN'S DISCIPLE.

THE boy was awakened by the scrape and flare of a match, and saw his new acquaintance sitting up in the bed with wide eyes, staring out of a face that was as a dead man's for pallor.

"The crying!" he was saying, as if in his sleep. "The crying in the night!"

Then as the boy moved he spoke again.

"Hush!" he said. "Listen!"

The two beds were set against the wall dividing Salmon's house from the next, and Eli's shadow, menacing and enormous, moved with the moving flame against a background of blotched and faded wallpaper and dirty ceiling.

The match went out and there was silence, pierced after a moment by a sudden wailing voice from beyond the thin partition.

"O Mary! Mary!" it cried.

Eli sprang from his bed; his hands were shaking as he lit a candle.

"Mary!" the voice cried again, and then fell to a low moaning.

"My God! What is it?" said Eli.

"Augh!" answered the boy, pulling up his blankets afresh, "it's only that Irish girl next door I reckon."

Eli turned towards him in mute question.

"The new girl, her they calls Kate," the boy explained. "She takes on like that now and again, and then Bill Sweeny, ner Bella, ner nobody can't do nuffin' with her. She'll never be no good, Bella says, ain't got no sperrit, but Bill Sweeny, he says he'll give her sumpfin' ter grizzle at one o' these days, an' I bet he will too."

Eli scarcely heeded. He was straining his ears to catch the sounds beyond the wall.

The low fretting went on unceasingly, and then again rose the wail of "Mary!"

"Where is she?" said Eli suddenly.

"She mostly sleeps in the room top o' the stairs, one next to this. Why, what's the matter?" the boy added in surprise, for Eli was throwing on his clothes with a sailor's quickness, yet he still moved as might a man in a dream.

He took the candle and went downstairs, making no answer.

As he opened the door into the street a gust out of the night blew the flame level for a moment, and he stayed to shield it with his cap. As he did so two men came shouldering out from the next door. The last turned a moment.

"Don't shut up, Bella," he called to someone within. "I'll be back directly," then leaving the door ajar, he caught up with the man in front, and the pair went down the street wrangling in low tones.

Eli did not hesitate but went straight in, to find himself in a dim passage lit only by the lamp over the street door. To the right another door stood open and he could see a room more brilliantly lighted, and a woman sitting at a table, her head fallen forward on her arm.

THE NIGHT IN THE BOARDING HOUSE 217

She had coarse yellow hair, he noted, tied with blue ribands. A bottle and glasses stood near her, one of the latter was overturned, and liquor had run from it over the cloth and was dripping to the floor.

As Eli passed she raised her head, showing a lined and painted face, and eyes glazed with drink and sleep. She looked at him a moment stupidly, then dropped back into her former attitude.

Eli went up the stair and opened the door to the left. As he turned the handle he heard the voice he had followed cry shrilly:

"Oh, no, *no!* Mother of God, not again!" and fall to a low whimpering, and then the old wail rang out, "O Mary! Mary! take me away!"

He moved his cap from before the candle and lifted the light. Against the wall he saw a young girl crouching in bed, clutching the coverlet about her with a frenzied gesture. Dishevelled black locks hung over her shoulders, and her face was distorted with fear and weeping.

She looked up at Eli's dark form standing tall and straight, the taper held high, the light focussed on his pale face and wide eyes, and gilding his ruffled hair, and she fell silent.

"I heard you calling Mary and I came," he said, speaking his own thought aloud.

What his look and voice conveyed to the girl I can only guess, but her lips fell apart, and she put her hands slowly together with the gesture of a child at prayer.

"Holy Michael!" she whispered, but Eli scarcely heard her.

"Do you wish to come away?" he asked, and she threw out her hands in an eager movement of assent.

"Then come," he said. "I will take care of you. Dress yourself quickly."

Already she had moved to obey him. He placed the

candle on the table and turned away, first shutting the door. He heard the girl's movements, then a little sound of distress.

"They have taken my shoes," she said helplessly.

"Here are mine," he answered, and loosened them from his feet.

Soon she stood before him dressed in hurried fashion.

"Come," he said, and opened the door. She stretched a hand towards a tawdry hat, hesitated, then quickly wrapped her head and shoulders in a dark shawl that lay near. He took up the candle once more, and together they went down the stair and into the street, no one gain-saying them. As he drew the door to behind him the draught extinguished the candle.

The first glimmer of dawn had begun to show greyly on the houses opposite, but Eli and the girl stood for a moment on the darker side of the road. A dim figure turned the further corner and they heard approaching footsteps on the wooden planking of the sidewalk.

"Oh, 'tis Sweeny!" the girl whispered in terror. "Oh, quick! quick! for the love of God!"

She caught Eli's hand, dragged him a few paces, then broke from him and ran blindly down the street, Eli following. He overtook her round the next turning, but could not pacify her till they had put a considerable distance between themselves and the house whence they had started.

It was growing lighter every moment. Suddenly the girl turned and looked at him as though she had not seen him before.

"Where are you takin' me?" she cried. "Oh, what will I do? Holy Saints! what will I do?"

She broke away again, and again he followed until she sank down on a bank of earth at the foot of a high wall, beating her knees and moaning.

THE NIGHT IN THE BOARDING HOUSE 219

He had some experience of the lower classes of various nationalities, and recognised in her that particular type of Irish peasant which loses all reason and control under stress of emotion. He questioned her, but could get no answer beyond keening and incoherent invocations of all the members of her pantheon.

He looked around him. They had reached a quiet quarter with scattered houses and gardens. Over the wall beyond the bank he could see the upper branches of shrubs, and further away, the dark spires of a group of cypress standing against the sky.

He sat down again near the girl, who was now prone on the earth huddled in her shawl. Somehow he did not feel surprised or puzzled. He felt he had only to wait and the situation would clear. So he waited, and as he waited, the sun rose.

Presently he saw two women approaching, two nuns, their dark habits and white coifs standing out sharply against the dusty roadway. Each carried a small "grip" as though just come from a journey.

They paused not far from him, and he saw that they were standing at a wooden door, a little sunk in the wall, and at that he knew what he must do, and went towards them. It was only when he spoke that they appeared to see him.

"You can help me," he said, and looked from one to the other.

A glance at the face of the nearest nun was enough. The gentle obstinacy of the formally-set mouth, and the meek, unseeing eyes blinking a little behind glasses, and already looking away from him, showed that here, in his own phrase, was "one of the stop-where-you're-put sort." There was no help in her, and he turned to her companion.

A plain, pale face, marked with reddish eyebrows; clear eyes; a tall, rather square figure and long hands;

it might have been the sister of the woman in the boat that other morning in Colombo harbour.

He pointed to the girl crouching by the wall.

"There's some bad trouble here," he said. "I have done what I could. It's a good woman's job now, ma'am, and I must leave it to you."

At the sound of his voice the girl looked up.

"Oh, glory be to God!" she said, and rose to her feet. The sight of the nuns seemed to have quieted her. She drew near and dropped them a pitiful little curtesy.

"Will you talk to her, ma'am?" Eli said. "I don't even know her full name, but she'll tell you, I expect. I'll be here if you want me."

He turned away and waited out of earshot, a little along the road.

After a while the taller nun signed to him to return.

"She tells me her name is Catherine Rooney," said the Sister. "She has no mother or other relations. Her father died a short while ago, soon after they left Ireland. She says that she fell into the hands of wicked people, and prayed to the Blessed Virgin, who sent you to save her."

There was a half questioning tone in her voice, and he noticed that now both nuns were looking at him eagerly.

"I was next door, and I heard her cry out 'Mary,' " Eli answered, "and then I brought her away."

"You are a Catholic, doubtless?"

"No," said Eli, and saw the spectacled nun drop her eyes and settle her hands in her sleeves.

"Perhaps, Sister Clara, it would be better if this . . . gentleman . . . applied to the Sisters of Mercy, since this is evidently not a case which we can help," she said in a low tone to her companion.

The latter was silent, looking at the girl.

"I think we must consult the Reverend Mother, Sister Gertrude Elizabeth," she said at last, then turned to Eli.

"Will you both come in and wait a little? I will ask the Reverend Mother if she will see you."

"Thank you," he replied.

Sister Gertrude Elizabeth pulled at an iron bell handle. Presently a shutter behind a grating was drawn aside, and after a few words on the part of Sister Clara, a portress admitted the four into a kind of covered way opening on either side upon a garden space set about with dark shrubs.

The tall nun indicated a bench.

"Will you wait here?" she said, and she and her companion went through a further door into the house beyond.

Eli sat down and looked at the girl, who appeared to shrink away from him. She went towards the door through which the nuns had entered, and sank down on the step. She drew her shawl round her and shivered, more with fatigue than cold, he thought, then dropped her head on her knees and seemed to doze.

Eli looked down at his shoeless feet, and then became aware that he was still holding the candlestick he had taken from Salmon's house. He set it down and tried to tidy himself a little, smiling to think of the odd figure he must have presented to the eyes of the good ladies he had accosted so unceremoniously; but even yet the strangeness of the whole adventure did not strike him. It all seemed natural and inevitable, something that his whole life had been tending towards for years. Which, I believe, was in a sense, true.

They were admitted presently to the convent parlour, a bare room with a table near a further door, through which, after a while, Sister Clara entered, accompanying an older nun, the Reverend Mother.

The latter and Eli looked at one another for a moment, and the girl again curtsied.

The nun's dark eyes turned towards her as she did so, acknowledging the salutation more with a glance than a gesture. Then she seated herself at the table and drew her sleeves over her hands, and a silence followed.

I do not know if she expected Eli to speak, or whether it was that both had a talent for saying nothing until moved to words.

The pause was broken by a whimper from the girl. She stretched out her hand behind her as if groping for the wall. Sister Clara went towards her and put her arm about the swaying figure.

"I think she's a bit exhausted, ma'am," Eli said to the elder nun, who had not stirred.

"Will you go with Sister Clara, my child?" the Reverend Mother said, in a voice of extraordinary depth and sweetness. "Sister Clara, will you ask Sister Josepha to give her some breakfast, and will you then come again to me here?"

She spoke with a slight foreign accent, Eli thought.

When they were alone the nun turned to him.

"Please tell me what has happened," she said.

Eli obeyed, very briefly, and as he was speaking, Sister Clara returned. The elder woman put a few questions. After the first, she did not look directly at him.

"You tell me that this girl is quite a stranger to you, that you had not seen her till you heard her praying, and brought her to us. Am I to believe that?"

Eli's eyes narrowed at the slightly ambiguous phrase.

"That is what I am telling you, ma'am."

"But why should you apply here? Who sent you to this house?"

"I had never heard of this house, ma'am, and I don't even know the name of it now. I did not know where we

THE NIGHT IN THE BOARDING HOUSE 223

were going till I saw this lady," he turned to Sister Clara, "and then it seemed clear."

The nun's hand fell to the beads hanging at her girdle.

"But you are not a Catholic," she said, as if in answer to something unspoken.

"Does that matter?" said Eli, and was surprised to hear his own question, for it was not what he had expected to say.

Then again there was silence.

"What do you wish me to do?" she said at last. "You must understand that we have not the means or the organisation to deal with a case such as this."

"I am not asking you to provide the means, ma'am," Eli answered. "I could pay a certain amount myself. I'm asking you to do what a man like me can't do, and what only a woman can. She *must* have her chance—now."

"I am not English," the nun said, after another pause. "It is perhaps difficult for me to explain to you, but our Order . . ."

She broke off as Eli made a slight movement. It was true that he had mistaken the meaning of her words.

"That was what the other lady was saying outside," he answered, "and that was why I wished to see you, ma'am, because I understood you were the person who gave orders here. If that's not so, perhaps I could see the head of this establishment, whoever it may be. I can't think but that I'd get some help then," he added, a little vaguely. He was saying to himself that it was time all these objections, "muslin curtains," he called them in his own mind, were cleared away, and the thing to be done got on with. Unwittingly he fixed his eyes as he spoke, on the big black and white crucifix, hanging on the plastered wall, and both nuns followed his glance, and then looked at each other as if startled. Sister Clara's hands were clasped and her lips moved silently.

The Reverend Mother rose from her chair.

"I will do what I can," she said. "This child, Catherine, shall stay here to-day to rest. I will consult, and make enquiries. I think that perhaps the Sisters of Charity could take her as an inmate of their home of rescue."

But Eli would have none of rescue homes. He wished the girl to be happy and "have her chance," he said.

The nuns hinted that he might be prejudiced, and he replied that perhaps such was the case, yet held to his point.

"But I fear this will cost much money," the Reverend Mother said at last. "Living is dear, and though perhaps we might find friends who would help a little, as yet I cannot tell, and we ourselves have no money of our own to give."

"Will thirty pounds do it?" asked Eli.

"Thirty pounds? That is one hundred and fifty dollars, is it not? Yes, it should suffice. If you will come again about six o'clock this evening, I will tell you what we have decided."

"Thank, you, ma'am. I'll bring the money then," said Eli, as if everything were now arranged. He moved to go, then looked at his feet.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but can I have my shoes? Kate's wearing them. She couldn't find her own."

"Oh," said Sister Clara, on a soft breath, and then she went to find the portress and the shoes, but over the face of the Reverend Mother crept a reflection of Eli's smile. It came slowly, as if it were an unaccustomed movement. It began in her eyes, he noticed, and ended in a little crease that might once have been a dimple, at the corner of her mouth.

Eli returned at six with all his fortune in his pocket,

to find that his way was clear before him. Discreet enquiries had been made and an old couple found who would take care of Catherine till she could be trained for some employment.

Eli counted out thirty pounds and laid the bills on the table.

"Would you wish to see Catherine?" the nun asked.

Eli said there was no need.

"But you would wish to have some account of the stewardship of those who will undertake this matter?"

"I'm a rolling stone, ma'am," he answered, "and I don't know where I may be to-morrow. The thing is in your hands now."

They looked at him in mild wonder as he took up his cap to go. Then the elder woman fixed her dark eyes on him a moment very kindly. "You have done a very charitable action. Will you not tell us your name," she asked.

For one moment Eli hesitated, looking down at the cap in his hands.

"My name is Eli Buckle," he said. And I think that was the end of the "swill tub" for Eli.

Unless . . . on other planes . . .

"That which is above is as that which is below," is an old saying, and it has a disagreeably authoritative sort of ring about it. John Bunyan too . . . and of course there was Ananda. Ugh! as if one sort of trough was not enough. Let us hasten back to the parlour.

"We shall pray for you, Mr. Buckle," the Reverend Mother said in her grave voice."

"Thank you, ma'am, and good-bye," Eli answered equally gravely, and then as he looked at her his whole face grew suddenly boyish with laughter, and he held up a ten dollar bill he had been about to put in his pocket.

"Will you pray that I get a job soon, ma'am, please, for this is all the money I've got in the world now."

He bowed and went out still smiling, and the two nuns looked at one another once again, and having done so, crossed themselves.

V: A NEW LAND

V: A NEW LAND

CHAPTER XXIV

UP COUNTRY

I DO not know if the Reverend Mother and her nuns did pray for Eli after the manner he had indicated, but if so, their petitions were granted.

He found a job soon and one well suited to his capacities. A cattleman from the Okanagan country was about to take some pedigree stock to his ranche, and engaged Eli to help him.

The two had some talk during the leisurely voyage northward to Victoria and then through the inlets and up the great Frazer River to the port of Hope. Eli found himself literally in a new world here, a world of inland fiords bordered by hills clothed in pine forests, sometimes green, sometimes burnt and desolate. Now and again he caught glimpses of snow peaks towering above the lower ranges, but during most of the way fog hung over the land. The people he met, and indeed the whole form and pressure of the country seemed to him strange, and at first, perplexing.

The seafaring life is founded on traditions that reach far back and strike deep, that claim and exercise an inexorable authority over even wastrels and vagrom men, should they take to the sailor's trade. They are living traditions too, and the ocean, that watchful and hungry enemy and mother, sees to it that the code is not violated for long.

The life of rural England, the only other life that Eli had hitherto known, is also a life grounded in traditions, which seem to be as much part of the soil as of the people who for generations have dwelt upon it.

Now in this new and formidable country Eli found himself among an inchoate rabble, as yet only beginning to shape itself into a society, a people without roots in a land without a history.

"Seemed all of a frazzle, like the end of a chewed stick," he said to me once, when speaking of his first experience of Colonial life.

For deep in his soul the English peasant reverences the earth he tills, and to hear men discussing the land as if it were a thing to be merely ravaged and left, shocks one of his fundamental instincts. The phrase "Skin the place and get out," a favorite one enough in new countries on the Anglo-Saxon fringe, angered Eli though he scarcely knew why. In truth though the adventurous concomitants of the "get rich quick" philosophy of life would always have had an attraction for him, the philosophy itself had none. He had in him nothing of the stuff out of which millionaires are made, but he had much of the stuff a country needs in her people if she is ever to become more than a kind of slag heap on the outskirts of civilisation.

Perhaps it was for this reason that Eli did not linger on the Lower Frazer, and saw little of the wild times when Andrew Onderdonck ruled his Babel legions of Chinese and Italians and the sweepings of two hemispheres, sending the great ox teams hither and yon, filling the ravines with the sound of blasting, and scarring the precipices with the trace of the great railroad in the years when pay-day among the saloons of Port Yale was a thing to be remembered.

Of course all this was before I knew those parts, and

the Lower Frazer is not my country either. The land I love sweeps far to the northward, a dry land and a sunny, her hills kept green by winter snows and her valleys by largesse from glacier streams. Led by chance, or other and subtler attractions and repulsions of the soul, it was towards this more unsettled country that Eli took his way in the thirty-third year of his age.

It was a district then so far withdrawn from the main lines of traffic that you approached it slowly with some difficulty, and even mild hardship, should fate prove unkind. Even the first part of the journey made from Yale or Beechcroft by stage coach or sleigh, according to the season, could not be called luxurious travelling. You lodged at "stopping houses," and rising before dawn, followed a rough road till often hard upon midnight, sometimes skirting precipices, sometimes stuck fast in mud holes, while the drivers of the stage waggons exercised their craft often upon unbroken horses. Journeying onward, the taint of the towns gradually fell away, and the spirit of that great and lonely land began to flow about you, touching you softly here and there till the day came when the jolting and swaying coach passed onward beyond the Point Fifty House, leaving you to cross the Great River and perhaps to attain to some inkling of Man's true importance in the landscape of New Caledonia.

It is here that once again I begin to see Eli more clearly in relation to his surroundings.

From Hope he had gone on to Port Yale with a letter of introduction from the Okanagan rancher to a cousin of his, a certain James Dod, the head of a survey party that was about to map some of the unknown region lying towards the source of the Axe River far away in the Western Mountains.

Dod needed an extra man, and engaged Eli, and to-

gether they journeyed northward to join the rest of the company already assembled and encamped on the further side of the Great River.'

They were a small party, a young mineralogist, three other white men, and a string of pack horses. These were Siwash cayuses for the most part, hardy little beasts with big, ugly heads and indifferent manners.

Out of consideration to his long legs Eli was given the biggest horse in the band, a staid "buckskin" who, like Wilkins, might have been a gentleman once, but who had seen hard times and learnt to adapt himself to any company. Sailor though he was, Eli soon found himself fairly at home on horseback.

The Okanagan rancher had advised his late helper in the choice of his simple outfit, and the expedition furnished him with his mount and trappings. One may therefore picture him clad in blue jean overalls, a check cotton jumper over his flannel shirt, a silk neck handkerchief, and a broad-brimmed Stetson hat. His coat was strapped to his stock saddle, a Spanish-looking affair, built with a high cantle behind, and a brass-nailed peak in front; he also carried a small white cotton flour bag (with the mill stamp in blue still showing upon it), which contained the rest of his baggage. The other men were equipped much after the same fashion, except the cook, who being a townsman, lately escaped from some fastness of respectability in the English Midlands, naturally leant towards the picturesque in the matter of attire. He wore much befringed buckskin "shaps" over his trousers, a red shirt, and a hat-band trimmed with silver, all this to the scandal and disgust of such of his companions as were Canadian born, and whose own tastes led them towards black broadcloth on all possible and most impossible occasions.

The camp broke up the morning after Eli's arrival. All

that long, hot day of early summer the party rode at a foot's pace through sun-warmed pine forest smelling of incense, up long, dusty, sandy slopes, where the grey sage brush flung her aromatics on the mountain air, down into creek bottoms and among swampy places where the horses shied and blew at every muddy patch they had to cross, and where the willow scrub and undergrowth sent wafts of perfume after them as they brushed by.

Here and there Jacob's ladders, such as grow in cottage gardens at Bourne, showed their familiar faces amid other and stranger blossoms, and at first every little blue flower of them pricked at Eli's heart as with the point of a needle.

But soon, as the miles fell behind him, the quiet and the sunshine and the sweetness of that great clean land lulled his pain.

The little company rode on till in the mid-afternoon they came out from a spur of forest on a wide, grassy plateau, high up and bare of trees. As they did so they saw in front of them as it were, a shining wall running from east to west along the horizon, and instinctively the cavalcade halted. Across a hundred miles of wooded hilltops, and for the first time in his life Eli found himself looking out upon one of the great mountain ranges of the world.

What shall be said of them, those snowy mountains? I think there can be none like them.

They do not crowd upon you as the Alps crowd upon Switzerland; they do not sweep up, gracious and protecting, as Fuji sweeps up from the sea; they do not frown as the Rockies frown on the men who burrow and hustle among their valleys. What is man to that white legion of Archangels, and what mention shall be made of him in their presence?

As they stand in their ranks, those Companions of St.

Michael, the light is a silver splendour upon them, and the shadows in the graving of their armour are bluer than the sky.

"I've never crossed the Piper Meadows on a clear day and seen those hills a-shining, but something inside me wanted to stand up and clap its wings and crow like a cock at dawn."

So said Eli to me many years after his first sight of the Western Range, taking refuge in the grotesque, as an Englishman will, at the thought of what has moved him, and I, who have also crossed the Piper Meadows, know very well what he meant.

Soon his destiny was to draw him closer, to live near one of the greatest of those snowy mountains, watching its peaks by summer and winter, by night and day.

I think that something of that nearness clung about him afterwards till the time of his death, so that in my mind, even after he had left them half the world away, I could never think of him and them as wholly sundered and apart.

The men rode on and after some hours began to descend into the valley of the Axe, camping that night at a little ranche and store, where they bought fresh meat and loaves in order to postpone the day of "baking-powder bread" as long as possible.

At a Rancheree or Indian village near by Dod picked up two Indians of the local tribe, great hunters who knew the upper country well and who would act as guides. Three days later the survey party were entering upon the unmapped and unknown district which was to be the scene of their labours.

Eli soon learnt enough of his chief to see that as far as he was concerned these labours were not likely to prove excessively arduous. In the delightful and expressive Chinook jargon, then a good deal spoken by both Indians

and white men, there was a considerable amount of *clonas* (perhaps) and *wicksiyah* (pretty nearly) about the whole survey.

Sometimes the men would be employed clearing a small Pisgah view on the brow of a crag, whence Mr. Dod would do a little very free-hand sketching. The compass and barometer were consulted fairly often, the other instruments spent a good deal of time in their cases.

So did not the bottles of whiskey, but that could not greatly have affected the result. The Indians were called upon for opinions as to what was the probable course of any river, or size of any lake the party encountered. These retainers, being provided with an unaccustomed wealth of rifle cartridges, kept the camp well supplied with venison, grouse and duck, but they frequently became bored and sought relaxation at the nearest encampment of their fellows, where they remained till they had gambled away everything they could possibly dispense with, returning to tell pitiful tales of their distressed Mamas and Papas and the need they had been under to minister to the necessities of these relatives. On these occasions the members of the more advanced races were wont to knock off work and go a-fishing till their dusky henchmen saw fit to come back.

The mineralogist poked about a little with a hammer and a washing-out pan, but as he was not interested in knowledge for its own sake, and this was not an auriferous region, he soon became discouraged.

Meanwhile the outing was a pleasant one. Wages were good, and as the Government would foot the bill and ask few questions except perhaps as to the political influence of the chiefs of the expedition and their friends on the coast, it might have been imagined that the summer months would have passed agreeably enough to all concerned.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SURVEY

IT seems, however, that few groups of people, whether nations or companies, can safely be entrusted with leisure and spare cash. Grant these two blessings to any such aggregate of ordinary persons, and it will, as a rule, set about becoming a nuisance to its neighbours.

To this rule the survey party was no exception.

Dod had traced the Axe River to the spot where it issues from a large lake, and here he established himself for some weeks not far from a canyon where the Indians congregated in summer to spear and dry salmon for winter use.

Before long bad blood arose between the two encampments, the causes being such as are usual under similar circumstances, namely, women and whiskey.

Eli felt that he had seen enough trouble of both kinds during his life at sea, and held aloof, but by the middle of August everything was getting in train for one of those quick tragedies of wild life to which the upper country had not been altogether a stranger.

By this time the surveyor had begun to recognise a useful assistant in Eli, one who could be trusted to wind up chronometers, and even to take a reading with the sextant, should the hand of his chief be more than unusually unsteady.

Dod was asleep in his tent one morning, and Eli, the only man just then in camp, was busied among the stores, when he saw a dug-out canoe approaching. From it dis-

embarked a dignified, elderly personage in buckskin, wearing a bright silk handkerchief twisted fillet-wise round his head in lieu of a hat. He was attended by a handsome, square-jawed man of about forty, and a youth who spoke a little English and a more modern form of the Chinook jargon than that known to the two elder Indians. All three carried rifles, and the boy, a string of trout and some duck and "fool hens" also.

"Clahowyah," said the latter, in the dragging, vibrant tones of his race. Eli, who had picked up some words of the jargon, answered the salutation by a polite, "Clahowyah, Tillicum," and waited for further explanations.

"You Tyhee? Boss, ain't it?" was the next question.

Eli said the Boss was "*Siyah*," and pointed to the tent.

The three visitors conversed together a while in their own liquid, clicking tongue, then the young man again addressed Eli in Chinook.

"Ocock Gishon Tyhee. Meneia Tyhee. King you savvy?" he said, pointing to the oldest Indian. "Tikkinanitch. Likea see you Boss."

Eli went to the tent, woke Dod, and explained the situation. The surveyor thought a moment.

"Meneia Gishon, is it? Wonder what he wants. I've heard of the old rip. Said to live in a sort of fairy tale robber valley, 'way south of the river. He ain't a man to monkey with from all accounts. I guess I'd best see him."

He looked round at the disorderly tent.

"There's no room here. Tell him I'll come. Bring me a pan of water first and you'd better stay handy."

Eli obeyed, and presently Dod, still a little blear-eyed, but with his wet hair smoothed into quite citified respectability, came out and greeted the chieftain.

Dod spoke Chinook well (not a difficult accomplishment to acquire), and the interpreter was seldom needed.

The interview began with the presentation of the game, and Eli had a whimsical recollection of Sir John and Lady Holt. Were they still alive? he wondered, but he did not let his thoughts stray towards Bourne more than he could help.

He could only understand a little of the conversation between Dod and the Indians, but he gathered that Gishon was dealing politely but firmly with the surveyor, pointing out how healthful and interesting were the valleys on the other side of a range of mountains lying to the northwest, and how far more suitable for shooting and fishing and all such gentlemanly sports, than the neighbourhood of the Salmon Camp at that season of the year.

Dod was no coward, but neither was he a fool. He understood the warning very well, and he reflected that though the Government might not be unduly critical of his maps, they would not thank him if he became involved in a shooting affray with the Indians, even if he survived to report a victory; also he was due in the valley of the Tsilicot at the close of the season, to survey some land a rancher wished to buy from the Government. If he went northward he could strike the upper waters of the Tsilicot River and follow it down to his destination.

He and his visitors, therefore, parted in quite friendly fashion, and somewhat to the disgust of the rest of the party, the survey camp broke up next morning, and the men and horses began to climb the foothills of the ridge to the north.

It seemed strange to Eli that here among the actual buttresses and outliers of the Western Mountains, the giants themselves were almost always invisible.

From the Piper Meadows they had shown as a continuous wall; nearer, he learned what stretches of lake and valley and rolling woodland sundered one group of snow hills from another.

Nevertheless the influences of the great peaks dominated all.

While camped in the valley a storm wind had arisen every evening, rushing through the rocky gulch at the mouth of the lake, to sink again in an hour. Eli did not then recognise it for a kind of Last Post, blown from the citadel of the highest peaks to tell the darkened lands below that now the sun had left the Western battlements stark and wan, to keep their seaward watch above his grave.

In such manner and in ways more subtle also, the mountains were wont to signal, but as yet Eli had not learned their language.

Both the summits towards the great river and those of the Southern Gate were hidden in mist when the party gained the plateau, a wide and barren tableland well above the timber line. They halted at noon by two small lakes fed by a dirty-looking little glacier, and came at fall of dusk to a grassy shelf on the northern face of the range, where they pitched their camp. On one side a little brook ran down a cleft to meet an aspiring tongue of pine forest, and burrowing through a tangle of raspberry and Solomon's Seal, flung itself into a blue gulf of dimness below.

Beyond this deep and misty valley, already full of night, rose a further mass of hills. By the light yet lingering among them it was possible to discern upon their precipitous flanks long scars of rocky gullies filled with snow, white lines that suggested folds of drapery veiling the body of a recumbent giantess, whose stern and aquiline profile was formed by the mountain crest.

While supper was preparing Eli helped Tenas Billy, one of the guides, to picket the horses, and when that task was finished, the Indian, in disjointed phrases, told him the native legend of the mountain opposite.

Long ago, said the guide, a man and a woman who were very great visited the little lakes the expedition had passed that day, to search for "Siwash potatoes." The man and the woman dug up many of the roots, but disputed as to the disposal of their harvest.

The quarrel was a bitter one, and the lovers parted, never to meet again, for now the woman lay there, in front of Eli, staring always up to the sky, while the man slept on another mountain, many days' ride to the southward, a mountain the Indian had never seen.

Eli was silent when the tale came to an end, and he and the narrator stood there together for a while watching the great face slowly darken against the sky, till a cheerful shout from the cook called them to supper.

The company was a little chastened by late experiences, and by the fact that whiskey and other luxuries were becoming scarce, and camp etiquette, which had been greatly relaxed in the valley, resumed its sway. Dod and "The Mineralogy," as the cook called him, sat together apart, and were served with their bacon and hot bread and tea, in state. The other white men congregated on one side of the camp fire, while the Indians took their places "below the salt," that is, on the opposite side of the blaze. This arrangement did not, however, prevent conversation, and after supper Eli left Tenas Billy, the English-speaking guide, washing up in a perfunctory manner, and regaling the cook with the simple scandals of the Ranches and Rancherees for a hundred miles around, interspersed with inelegant extracts from the biographies of the more prominent and respected horses dwelling in the same district.

Eli came back to the ledge of pasturage to give a final look to the picket ropes. All was well, and he wandered on a little further. It was dark now and even the white draperies of the Mountain Woman were hardly dis-

cernible, but a glimmer of starlight touched the edge of a field of snow that rested upon her cold bosom. Between him and her lay the unfathomed depths of the valley, from which rose never a sound—even the voice of the brook could not reach him, but was swallowed up by the enormous silences of the mountains and the sky.

A thin breath of air rose from the gulf beneath, touched his cheek and passed upward, yet seemed to have made no movement at all. He turned towards the camp. The horses only told as darker shades on the darkness of the herbage, but beyond them the ashes of the fire glowed red and orange, and as he looked, threw up a slender tongue of rose-coloured flame.

It was as though it beckoned him from some place of danger to one of warmth and safety, but even as the fancy came he shivered, for it appeared to him that some deep down and unknown part of himself was about to speak and he knew in his heart that he was afraid to hear.

"Come," the fire signalled, "while I still have power to protect you. Come quickly out of the night!" and Eli hastened to obey.

How human and comforting seemed that lonely hearth as he crouched before it, heedless of the pungent smoke that stung his nostrils and his eyes.

He threw fresh pine logs on the embers before he rolled his blankets about him and slept like the other men around him, his feet towards the flame.

The party moved again next day and camped in the valley, then passed through undulating forest land, diversified by grassy flats and swampy meadows, with little to break the monotonous brown and green of the landscape, for the flowering plants had cast their blossoms now, and were hurrying to ripen seed before the Winter should be upon them, and the glory of Autumn was not yet.

Within a week the expedition had reached a string of lakes at the source of a tributary of the Tsilicot River, and now that they were drawing near to known country, Dod became rather more careful in his methods. His instructions had not mentioned this district, but he thought that a sketch map of his route might be accounted unto him for righteousness when he returned to "the coast," so he went slowly and took observations from time to time. His last halt was near the outfall of the lowest lake of the chain, where a little river, coming from the West, fell by a series of small rapids into a bay. Near by, on a grassy promontory, stood an Indian grave, marked by a pile of weatherbeaten logs and surrounded by a broken fence. Here the surveyor would have camped, but the Indians found reasons against it, rather inconclusive reasons, Eli thought. Finally the party rode a few hundred yards up the stream which they crossed and offsaddled in the valley just above the falls.

It was a sunny place, well sheltered from the North by sandy hills clothed with jack-pine. Towards it the river came rippling through natural meadows, while to the southward the mouth of the valley opened out to show a glimpse of the lake, above whose wooded shore and the bare ridges beyond, the triple peaks of a nameless snow mountain gleamed against the sky.

Dod looked round, noting the fertile soil and the levels of the valley floor.

"'Most a wonder no one's taken up this place," he said. "It's good meadow, and 'twouldn't take much work to get the water on. I believe a couple of sluices would irrigate quite a big patch. There's two or three old river courses too that would be ditches pretty nearly ready made."

Tenas Billy was standing near.

"He come quick, that river, sometimes," he said, a little uneasily.

"It can't be much above thirty miles from Martindale's and the Tsilicot country," Dod continued.

"I don't go none on the Tsilicot myself," the mineralogist answered. "Old Jack Sumner at the Point Fifty was about right. He was pretty mellow one night when I was down there waiting for you. 'You keep outen the Tsilicot Valley, my son,' he said. 'It's no place for a Christian. It's full o' Englishmen—bad Englishmen—in brown boots.' You know the way he talks when *he's* full, but I guess he hit it, if he *was* drunk."

Dod laughed.

"Well, there ain't any Englishmen here, bad or good," he said.

The mineralogist looked around.

"I guess anyone can have it for all me," he remarked. "Fancy living out here alone in this God-forsaken spot—winters too!"

"It's not my notion either," Dod agreed, "but I've known some men that appeared to like the life, and the loneliness too . . . all sorts of men . . . the last you'd ever think it of sometimes. It's queer! There's some that try these up-country places, and then quit all of a sudden as if the devil was after 'em, and there's some that stick it till they go mad. I've seen that myself down on the Great River. But I've heard old timers say that if a man gets over the first liking and the first hating, he'll never leave it again, or if he does he carries the brand of it on him for life. I guess that's maybe true."

"Old timers are generally pretty first-class liars," the mineralogist said placidly, and the subject dropped.

Two days after the party broke camp early and started for the Tsilicot River.

Dod and the mineralogist intended to push on to Mar-

tindale's ranche that day leaving the pack train to follow more slowly.

Eli was the last to leave the camp. He had gone back to the promontory to retrieve a line and some fish-hooks he had left there the evening before. As he passed the grave, he noticed that a rough basket, made of bark, had been placed upon the logs.

He re-forded the river and crossed the valley again; at a spot where the trail his companions had taken entered the forest he turned in his saddle and looked back.

The sun had not yet risen, and a thin haze clung to the surface of the lake, which, with the valley he had left and all the lower country, was still in shadow, but every eastward-looking facet and snowfield of the triple peak to the South was shining with rosy light.

CHAPTER XXVI

MARTINDALE'S

THE valley of the Tsilicot is of a somewhat different character from the country the expedition had traversed hitherto. Pine-clad hills, their summits edged with a low cliff of "rim rock," stand above sandy knolls covered with bunch grass and sage brush, which in their turn slope to meadow land and scrub through which the river runs swiftly.

Except from certain parts of this district the mountains cannot be seen, though it is among their peaks that the rare storms gather, and it is their melting snows that send the turbid flood water racing down the river in spring, and keep the clear stream so cold in summer.

It is a good cattle country and near the junction of the Tsilicot and the Axe several places had already been taken up, but Martindale's was at that time the only settlement in the upper valley.

The Rancho consisted of a group of log houses. Three of them formed the dwelling, but one of the wings was still unfinished, and the beams of axe-hewn pine stood gauntly against the background of sand-hill and trees. Behind and to one side were smaller cabins, the store and the forge. The whole cluster was surrounded by a big, untidy yard, "snake fenced" with logs, outside which were the stables and cattle sheds and the butchering corral with its wooden windlass and chute. On the rails of this latter enclosure the hides of the last beeves sacrificed were stretched to dry, in accordance with law and in order that

the visitors could, if they pleased, examine the brands and allay any suspicion they might feel as to the rightful ownership of the beef appearing upon Martindale's table.

At the approach of the cavalcade that young man came out of the house, together with Dod and the mineralogist, and since the building could not accommodate any more, pointed out a good camping place across the creek which supplied the ranche with drinking water.

All the survey party were anxious to purchase soap and tobacco and other small necessities, and Martindale summoned Ah Fong, his Chinese cook, to attend to their needs.

In those days most up country settlers kept an assortment of goods for sale or to exchange with the Indians for furs, but it was not every rancher who would allow his Chinaman to conduct such transactions. Ah Fong himself was inclined to be shocked at the laxity of his employer in this and other business matters. Martindale would promise amendment, and next time hand over the key of the store as of old. I do not think he lost anything by the trust he placed in his yellow retainer.

Ah Fong stood behind the rough counter, his quick, dark eyes glancing from one to another of the faces before him. He was in none too amiable a temper, for Martindale had decreed that all the white members of the expedition should sup at the house that evening, and Ah Fong considered "hired men" to be out of place at his master's table.

Your Chinaman, like the Englishman whom mentally he so much resembles, is generally an incurable snob.

The men were asking the prices of various goods, which owing to the expenses of haulage, were naturally high. They were rather inclined to "guy" the contents of the store, and they addressed Ah Fong as "John" which annoyed him further.

Presently Tenas Billy lounged in and reverently laid a miserable little mink skin on the counter.

"Clahowyah, Billy, you hunt-um mouse just now?" Ah Fong inquired with exaggerated politeness.

Billy shifted his moccasined feet, his big spurs clinking.

"Him *halo* mouse, him mink, delate skookum mink."

He threw an indignant accent on the "*halo*," that universal negative of the land.

"Suppose you buy him me tikki podagger," he added.

The Chinaman took about an eighth of a cake of T. and B. tobacco from a shelf, and pushed it towards Billy with a gracious air of finality. But the latter protested.

"Two cake sitcum more better," he announced with an air of wounded virtue.

Ah Fong picked up the skin, and thrusting a finger through a bullet hole in the back, twiddled it derisively, then sniffed the inside of the pelt.

"Pfui! Too muchee glease," he said, and handed the treasure back to its owner.

"Me tikki two piece podagger. Him *skookum* mink. Look see!"

Billy endeavoured to blow aside the short, stiff hairs of the fur, treating it as if it were the richest marten.

Ah Fong waved it away with quite servile humility.

"Yah. Too muchee good. Too muchee dear. More better send him Queen Victorlee."

Eli laughed, and Ah Fong flashed a quick smile towards him. The haggling was being done on both sides merely for love of the art. It was only a matter of a few pence, the skin was hardly worth buying or selling. Two millennia of inherited culture, however, are bound to tell, and Billy was no match for his adversary. He took half a cake of tobacco and a small block of sulphur matches,

and sitting down near the door, began to do elaborate calculations with a handful of straws broken into different lengths.

Ah Fong turned to Eli.

"Some soap, please," said the latter.

At the sound of his voice Ah Fong unbent still further. He offered Eli two boxes of toilet soap and named them.

"This one just stink-soap, this one *hyu* stink-soap."

Eli said that he preferred the former and less powerfully scented variety and paid for a cake.

The cook of the survey party also wanted soap, but objected to the price and the kind.

"Suppose you no likee, me no likee you buy," Ah Fong said with cold sweetness, and was about to remove the boxes.

"Hold on!" the other interrupted. "I'll have to get some, I suppose. I'm coming to supper with your boss to-night."

Ah Fong's eyes became as inexpressive as a pair of boot buttons, and his voice as that of a mountain rill in its tinkling clearness as he served his customer. By this, Tenas Billy, having apparently discovered that his finances warranted more extravagance, had again approached, and demanded soap in his turn as the cook moved away.

Ah Fong picked out a cake with immense care.

"*You* come supper long-side Nightingalo to-nigh'?" he asked sweetly as he handed it over.

The cook overheard, as was doubtless intended, and glanced back, a ludicrous expression of puzzled annoyance on his foolish pug face with its fiercely waxed moustaches, but Ah Fong's whole attention appeared to be absorbed by the Indian, who merely grunted in reply.

"Me just likee savvy," the Chinaman said meekly, and

was putting the box away when the literally-minded Billy began to explain.

"This soap good for trap," he said, sniffing the "hyu stink" appreciatively, "me halo wanter *wash*."

Ah Fong's eyes glittered and he gave his temper rein at last.

"No mattah," he answered incisively. "Suppose cow wash, suppose cow halo wash, him just cow aller same."

Eli turned away hurriedly to hide his amusement, but not before he had again caught a glance from Ah Fong, which said as clearly as though he had spoken, "So much for my adversaries, but I do not include you among them."

If you share a meal with an Arab it is a bond between you, but if you share a jest with a Chinaman he is, for the time being, yours. Ah Fong's malicious little speech was the beginning of an odd sort of friendship between him and Eli that led to unusual results, at any rate for one of them.

The mineralogist and the rest of the party continued their journey next day, but at Dod's suggestion Eli and Tenas Billy were retained by Martindale to cut view lines and generally help with the survey of the land the rancher wished to buy.

The valley had gradually been putting on an autumnal air. Now one or two frosty nights lit every meadow and hillside to a riot of flaming colour. Not a cottonwood tree but turned to a showering cloud of amber, the willows were coral and topaz, the leaves of the dwarf cherries and Amelanciers (Ollalie trees, the Indians call them) were like shavings of ruby and cinnamon stone. They were not only like jewels in colour but they grew thin and translucent so that the sun shone through them. The grass went dull gold, the more distant woods lapis lazuli,

and the river caught and threw back the turquoise of the sky.

Dod and his two assistants were on the rim rock one day, and after dinner Martindale rode up through the woods to join them. From this point a range of snow hills might be seen whose blue and white matched the clouds above them.

The rancher dismounted and strolled to the edge of the cliff, looking down on his broad acres in the valley beneath, and thence across river and forest to the distant peaks. He smiled at the gay prospect, then shook his head in mock disapprobation.

"Such a vulgar view!" he said. "All the hills so hilly, and the mountains so mountainous, and the pines so thick and green, with the autumn tints in an unrivalled range of art shades! Sort of thing you'd expect to see enamelled on a coal box in a back-east parlour."

Dod turned away. He came from London, Ontario, himself, and though he hated parlours and had fled from them, he did not consider it became a mere Englishman to turn up his nose at such sanctuaries of colonial refinement, but Eli, who was on Martindale's other side, smiled.

"Does look a bit as if you might expect to see 'Try Smears' Soap' written across the sky to-day," he said.

Dod supposed that Eli, being English, was mad at bottom like all the rest, though he had not noticed it before, but he made no comment.

They finished the rim rock section early that afternoon and the Surveyor, who till then had found his quarters comfortable, decided not to start the next piece of work till the morrow.

On returning to the ranche Eli saw Ah Fong at work on the new building and offered to help him. The Chinaman was delighted to find the volunteer so handy with

tools, and when milking time arrived he actually permitted Eli to continue carpentering alone, but he came back to help clear away before dusk.

"What for you boss no work this afternoon?" he asked.

Eli said that he did not know.

"Uph! Me savvy. Him no likee work, him likee work him mouth velly good. Beef 'teak, tomallo sauce, fly potato an' pullen, aller same. Him halo catchee pullen down waggon road, he savvy."

And neither Dod nor anyone else "caught pudding" that evening. Indeed, the supper was abominable.

"Ah Fong, aren't there any tomatoes?" Martindale asked, when a scraggy piece of cold salt meat and three tepid potatoes were set upon the table.

"Tomallo halo stop," said Ah Fong shortly.

"But three, four cans stop in store house."

"Me no can see tomallo. Plenty mustar' stop."

He handed the cruet to the disgusted surveyor with a flourish.

"Well, bring some more butter anyway."

"Me halo fix-um buttah to-day. *Me* work this afternoon."

Eli realised that "running out" methods were not entirely unknown on land.

They had finished the meal and were smoking in the dining room when a shout heralded a new arrival. This was Martindale's nearest neighbour, a rancher from some ten miles further down the river. Martindale helped him to stable his horse, and returning, introduced the Surveyor and Eli.

"You see, Mr. Dod," he explained, "this valley is entirely peopled by Army failures. My father was a poor soldier man, so I had to fail from my public school. Harrison and Demmert and the rest failed properly from

expensive crammers. By the way, Tom, have you had muckamuck? Well then, you'd better go and see if you can blandish the old man. Heaven knows if you'll get anything to eat. He's in a temper to-night."

Harrison strolled off into the kitchen, washed his hands, had some conversation with Ah Fong, and returned, followed by the latter, who proceeded to re-set the table with elaborate care.

Martindale looked on with some anxiety.

"Look here, Ah Fong. Mr. Harrison doesn't want much, just something quick."

"Hallison say him dam hungly," said Ah Fong imperturbably.

"Ted, you're growing mean since you came into money," laughed the innocent Harrison. "You go on and spread yourself, Ah Fong. I'll eat it all, don't you fret."

How it was done in the time it is impossible to say, but Harrison began that meal with soup, went on to steak *and* tinned tomatoes, with mashed potatoes to boot, and finished with a sweet.

Dod looked furious and went off to his own room, slamming the door.

"Now the fat's in the fire," said Martindale, "but I take you to witness I couldn't help it, could I, Buckle?"

"What have you been up to, Ted?" Harrison asked, stretching his booted legs to the stove. "Your old heathen's been telling me Chinese Sunday School tales about some celestial ruffian of ancient times who came to a bad end because 'him hyu likee whiskey, hyu likee poker, hyu likee woman.' Whose address am I to put that down to? Not my own, I gather, and Buckle here seems a favourite. It's either you or the Surveyor, unless you have been leading each other into mischief."

Martindale groaned.

"Fong's taken one of his scunners against Dod. It's lucky the survey is nearly done now. There won't be a decent bite for any of us unless I cook it myself. There's something wrong about this servile status of the yellow race. I call him Ah Fong, I don't believe it's really an honorific, but I wouldn't dream of dropping the Ah, on the mere chance of its not being etiquette to do so, and he won't even trouble to learn my surname. He calls me 'Nightingalo!' *tout court*, and starves my guests under my nose."

"M . . . m!" said Harrison appreciatively, "I didn't starve much to-night. The old sinner *can* cook, and it's fortunate he does keep you up to the mark a bit, you're such a happy-go-lucky devil. He says you'd be ruined if it wasn't for him."

"Like his impudence and yours too," Martindale answered, as he hove a copy of a popular magazine at the head of his friend.

This was all a new life to Eli. They were strange to him, these careless-seeming young gentlemen, with their keen tongues and easy manners who lived largely on what in England would have been small means, yet worked hard at hay-making and riding after cattle, feeding in winter and branding in spring and fall. But he liked Martindale and Martindale liked him, and both were glad to come to an arrangement by which it was settled that Eli should stay on at the Ranche for the autumn and help Ah Fong with the new house.

Eli bought his horse, saddlery and blankets for a small sum from Dod, who paid him the balance of his wages by cheque, and by Martindale's advice he opened an account with a bank at Beechcroft, where the old road threw out a tentacle to touch a newly completed section of the railway.

He rode with his employer and other ranchers on the

autumn round-up, when the cattle running loose on the range were collected and the calves branded, and altogether managed to learn a good deal of the routine of the business.

The days grew colder, the leaves fell from the cottonwood trees and the scrub, and one Thursday Martindale, who for some time had appeared absent-minded, returned from the post office beaming. He whistled as he stabled his horse, he sang on his way up the yard, then he came in and sat on a corner of the kitchen table and swung his legs till his spurs jingled rhythmically.

Ah Fong was chopping onions, using a butcher's knife with terrifying *brio*. One would have expected to see a bunch of finger tips fly at every stroke.

"Ah Fong," said Martindale solemnly, "I think me go syah salt-chuck see me Mama."

The Chinaman paused in his task.

"Pfui!" he said, "no good—more better stop here catchee dollah. You Mama helo sick."

"No," answered Martindale, "she's not sick, but don't you think I'm the sort of young man whose Mama *might* like to see him even if she were quite well?"

Ah Fong gave him a piercing glance and then went on with his onions.

Eli also looked at the speaker. As he sat there Martindale looked very much that sort of young man. He was about twenty-five years old, and from the time he was nineteen, when he had left the down-country ranche where he had been a pupil, he had fended for himself. When his father died, three years before Eli's arrival, he had gone home for a brief holiday, and returning, had pre-empted some land and invested his small patrimony in setting up a herd. It was a rough life at first, but he had prospered. That spring an unexpected legacy had lifted him to comparative affluence.

All this Ah Fong already knew and Eli was to learn.

Martindale turned towards the latter.

"I wonder if you'd care to stay through the winter and help Ah Fong to look after the place and the stock? Harrison will come over now and again, and you could ask him anything you wanted to know. Will you think it over? Ah Fong, you stop here? I'll be back with the crows in the spring."

"Yah, me stop. More better you stop too," Ah Fong answered. "Bimeby you catchee one Englis' girlee. What for you want-um wifoo? White woman wantee be boss aller time. Pfui! No good!"

Martindale looked at him in round-eyed amazement.

"Now what in the name of Confucius himself makes you think that?" he enquired plaintively.

"What for me no savvy? One letter come, you Mama letter, maybe you larp, maybe halo. One more letter come, you aller time hwhistle, aller time sing, you halo work, aller time *so*," Ah Fong indicated an inane and beatific grin. "Suppose that one more letter halo come, you aller same *ergh*!" He fell into a pose of hopeless and weak-minded grief. "Me savvy, white man aller same. Pfui!"

But this time the exclamation took on an almost benedictory sound, and Ah Fong sang a little in a high squeal, after Martindale had gone from the kitchen.

So it was that on the first of November Eli drove his employer down to the post office and returning, took up his winter's work on the ranche.

CHAPTER XXVII

AH FONG RECEIVES A VISITOR

WINTERS in the Tsilicot Valley are cold, but usually still. It is not a very snowy region; there is generally a fall of some two feet about Christmas time, which sinks considerably before Spring, though there may be another storm or two in the course of the Winter.

Unless the cold is exceptionally severe, the Tsilicot ranchers are wont to leave most of their horses and the big steers on the home range outside the fences, at any rate till the late Winter. The beasts are expected to "rustle," that is to say, to search about in the scrub and on the hillsides, and to pick up enough food for themselves.

The horses perhaps fare the best, since they paw away the snow to lay bare the herbage beneath. For some strange reason cattle will not do this; they will throw up dust with their hoofs in Summer to keep away biting flies, but will only use their soft noses to push the snow from the grass and sage-brush on which they feed.

A rancher needs to use judgment in apportioning his stores of hay among his herd, for labour is scarce and dear, and haymaking therefore a costly business. Martindale, however, took care to allow a good margin of safety. He had lost some cattle for want of fodder a year or two before, in an exceptionally long, hard winter, and had never forgotten the lesson then learned.

"If you are a business man and your investments go wrong you may be ruined," he said to Eli before he left,

"but that kind of stock vanishes quietly, it doesn't hang round your house bellowing for the food you haven't got and can't get to give it, and then leave its dead body under your drawing-room windows. Please the pigs. I'll never see beasts of mine starve again. Still I don't want you to waste hay."

Eli and Ah Fong generally kept some three horses in the stable, and the young cattle and breeding stock lived in the fenced pastures in the valley. Every morning the two men took a sleigh fitted with a broad timber rack down to the stacks, and cut out sufficient provender for the day; then one would drive the load in a long, curving track while the other threw out the food—this to prevent the hungry cattle crowding upon one another and also in order that the dung should be well dispersed over the meadows when the snow thawed in the Spring.

A milk cow or two were kept in a paddock near the house, and given extra food and a shed to live in; the rest of the kine sheltered in the patches of fir and brush-wood that broke the levels of the fields.

The sleigh had to make many journeys before all the band were fed, and beside this work, trees were to be dragged in from the forest, sawn up and split for firing, water brought from the creek, and such other odd jobs done about the place as the weather permitted, so that the daylight hours were well filled up. Now and again Eli would ride some twenty miles down the valley to fetch the mail, or perhaps a stray Indian would bring up letters. Ah Fong had a considerable Chinese correspondence, and Eli kept Martindale posted with the news of the ranche, and had already heard from him once, though it took a long while for a letter to reach or come from England. Once or twice Harrison rode over and looked round. He generally expressed himself as being well pleased with what he saw. The shell of the new wing of the dwelling-

house had been finished during the fall, and roughly partitioned to make a kind of saddle and gun room, with a couple of small extra bedrooms leading out of it, but to save firing Eli put up his bed (made of fir timber strung with raw hide and having a mattress stuffed with hay) in a room off the kitchen in which Martindale used to dine, and which was warmed by the flue-pipe of the cooking stove.

While his employer was at home he and Eli had taken their meals in the dining-room; after his departure Eli ate in the kitchen. White men and Chinese do not, as a rule, mess together; Ah Fong, always a stickler for etiquette, solved this knotty point by serving Eli at the table in the centre, while he laid his own repast at a smaller one near the window. Martindale had made Eli free of his bookcase which contained some fine, confused reading, but Eli often found his companion's conversation more to his taste than printed disquisitions.

Ah Fong, like so many of his countrymen, was a natural orator and story-teller; he had been fairly well educated as a boy, before he came abroad to seek a fortune, which he had not been destined to find. For years he had put much of his labour and savings into "a hole in the ground," but the mine had proved a failure. All that Ah Fong had got from it was disappointment and an attack of rheumatism, and now he had to content himself with the post of cook and general factotum on an up-country ranche, at a wage of thirty dollars a month, most of which went to his family in China—an old mother, a wife he had not seen for seven years, and a "son boy" he had never seen at all.

Eli soon learned to understand the strange jargon the Chinaman had made for himself out of pidgin English and Chinook, supplemented by phrases borrowed from

Martindale and his fellow-ranchers, and found Ah Fong an interesting companion.

The old man began by discoursing to him of Chinese history, interspersed with folk tales and personal reminiscences. Delighted to find such a good listener, he soon branched off into moral philosophy and excerpts from his national classics, and from this it was but a step to poetry. Ah Fong would become almost desperate over the difficulties of translation here, spluttering and stammering in his earnestness as he endeavoured to render the beauties of "one velly good sing-song" in the extremely unsympathetic medium in which the two conversed.

Listening to Ah Fong was no mean intellectual gymnastic, for he often cross-examined his hearer as to his comprehension of what had been said. The stories were, perhaps, the most difficult, as in order to make them the more vivid the narrator would describe the *dramatis personæ* in terms of the relationships of people known to his auditor. The virtuous hero, for instance, beside his proper name, was entitled "aller same Nightingalo," then there would be "aller same Nightingalo him Papa," or "Mama," or "Wifeo," as the case might be.

"You savvy Wang Yuan?" Ah Fong would say, leveling a brown forefinger at his listener, and Eli was expected to be able to place the character instantly by replying.

"Wang Yuan him aller same Nightingalo him Mama brother."

The stories, however, had a charm that made the effort to understand them worth while, though at first Eli could only get a vague inkling of the more poetical and philosophical parts.

Ah Fong, for all his fits of ill temper and his keen eye to the main chance, seemed to know the way to some country of the mind of which Eli felt himself to be a citizen.

The people of these tales and poems moved in an atmosphere the hearer had never breathed, and that yet came to him now and again like wafts of native air. It was not merely what was done or said by these tender or heroic women, these brave or sage men of whom Ah Fong told; it was what lay behind them, what was taken for granted about them, that gave Eli a sense of strangeness and yet won his immediate assent.

There is some thing about classical Chinese art and literature that touches certain Western minds in this way, especially among the English. I have felt the appeal of it myself. It is like an appreciation of a certain kind of music, and I think now that the fact that we were both attuned thus was part of the bond between Eli and myself, though during his lifetime perhaps neither of us recognised it. There is a like fellowship between those who respond in the same instinctive manner to the touch of the Greek genius. It is a thing innate, and though culture may make the response clearer and perhaps stronger, certainly more exquisite, I do not think it can be given where it is lacking.

One night Ah Fong was busy writing a beautiful Chinese letter, brushing the characters in on a long scroll, with elegant flourishings of his supple fingers, and diversifying the pattern here and there with impressions done in red from a wooden seal. Eli, who was mending a pair of moccasins, was sitting by the stove, underneath which couched a posse of purring cats, while Martindale's terrier lay stretched out in the glow from the half-opened iron door. Ah Fong set the final seal on his composition, read a few passages aloud to himself in the traditional sing-song, with obvious appreciation of his own literary merits, fastened up the screed ready to go to post on the morrow, and then inquired of Eli how it was that *he*

never wrote or received letters from anyone but Martin-dale.

Eli wondered. Why had he no friends to send him letters and desire news of him in reply? Nobody cared to have letters from him, he told Ah Fong. The latter considered a moment.

"Helo papa, helo mama stop?" he inquired.

Eli shook his head.

"Helo brudder, helo wiffo?"

"Helo cousin, helo friend," Eli finished the sentence for him rather bitterly.

"Pfui!" said Ah Fong, then shook his head reprovingly, "What er matter you? You velly good man, suppose you likee, you have fliend. My thinkke you helo send um letter you fliend that why."

Eli, considering the matter, saw that this was true. He had one friend at any rate, who, if she were alive, would be glad to have news of him. She had begged him to write—he remembered the scene with a pang—but he had been so eager to shut a door between himself and everything which reminded him of his trouble, that he had never sent her even a line of greeting. It was the old story, it hurt too much—a poor sort of an excuse for a man to make, Eli thought, looking back over the years. But there had been another. The Eli of the ships might have written, but the Eli of the slums did not care to remember Anne Brown. What of the Eli of the cattle ranche? Eli went for pen and paper.

"My dear Anne," he began, and then stopped. It was harder than he had expected, but he was going to send some kind of letter this time, and a very stiff and dull little note it was too. Anne has shown it to me, but it went to the mail next morning, and about once a year after that he and his old friend exchanged missives

scarcely less stiff and dull, but the two understood each other for all that.

At the post office Eli found a letter from Martindale awaiting him.

"Please break the news to Ah Fong that his gloomy predictions are about to be verified," he wrote. "I am going to be married, and expect to arrive with my wife early in March. I will write again as soon as I know the mail by which you may expect us. I have already shipped some household plenishings, such as extra linen and table ware, and have asked Harrison to arrange about having them freighted up from Beechcroft. If the cases arrive before we do they had better be put in the new house. I know these luxuries are quite unsuited to my position as a cow-puncher, but under the circumstances one can only do as the higher powers direct."

He went on to give some instructions about the early calves. It was a practical letter enough, but the happiness of the writer was apparent in every line of it, and Eli smiled as he read it. But he did not smile on the long ride home.

He noted a fresh sleigh track on the waggon road he was following; there was so little traffic that the trail was not properly "broken." He supposed some Indian had gone past since he left, though as a rule, the natives lived in their Rancherees in Winter, and did not move about much. It was beginning to get dusk as he neared the ranche, and it was cold—some fifteen or twenty degrees below zero, as he guessed it, for the hard-frozen snow groaned and squeaked under the horse's feet. There were no signs of life in the woods now, except the solemn booming of the great eagle owls, which sounded from

time to time from the depths of the forest. Several of these birds (Ah Fong opined that they were a species of Devil) were wont to hang about the ranche at night, and were the cause of more than one death among the cats. What else they found to live upon it was hard to imagine, for a man might ride all day in Winter and never catch sigh of fur or feather. The beasts were asleep or in hiding, and the world was silent, dead and still.

Through the day-time Eli scarcely heeded this death-like quiet, for then colour made a music of its own. The scarlet willow boughs flamed above the white levels of the meadows; the twigs of the cotton-woods showed like a purple mist between the near greens and distant blues of the hillside pines; and sunshine and clear sky laughed above all the desolation of the cold.

Now, as he rode homeward, even colour was dead, and the snow gleamed dully beneath the black of the overhanging boughs.

He had never known Winter such as this; there would have been something terrifying about it but that this strange, frozen world was calling to a part of him too cosmic and remote to be touched with an emotion so small and personal as fear.

When he reached the ranche an empty sleigh was standing in the yard. The forge-house fire was alight, and an Indian he knew was standing at the door. The man said something about "one more Chinaman," and pointed to the house. Eli stabled his horse, and went indoors.

There was a sound of voices in the kitchen, and entering he found Ah Fong and a fellow-countryman in deep discourse over several Chinese documents which were spread upon the table.

Both men rose as Eli entered, and Ah Fong introduced the stranger in due form.

"This Wen-Yen," he said. "He come just now Point

Fifty; stop Smith ranche last night; go Hallison house to-morrow see Wong. To-night him stop here."

Wen-Yen bowed and shook hands. He spoke English extremely well, in a rather bookish style, and appeared to be a person of education and distinction, so much so that Eli was rather surprised. He left the two in the kitchen and went into his own room, and presently Ah Fong brought in a small table, and began to lay it for supper. It was evident that to-night the Englishman was to feast alone.

"What-er-matter you?" said the old man, noticing that Eli seemed uneasy.

Eli explained that he had a pain over his eyes, the effect, he supposed, of the long ride in the cold.

Ah Fong nodded.

"All light," he said, "bimeby you finish supper, me tell Wen-Yen, him give you medicine maybe, him velly good doctor."

He was as good as his word.

Wen-Yen examined Eli's eyes and teeth, and asked him a few questions.

"I think it is only a neuralgia," he said. "I have something here that will soothe the pain."

He drew a small glass phial from his pocket, and handed it to Eli, bidding him rub a little of the contents on his forehead. The fluid felt very cold, and had a strong odour of peppermint; and after a few minutes of the treatment, the pain had nearly gone.

"The discomfort may return. You had better keep this bottle if you will favour me by accepting it. I have more of the preparation," Wen-Yen said courteously. Then he looked round the room. "I fear that my presence may inconvenience you. I trust that you are not sitting in this room on my account; it is perhaps a little cold for you since you have neuralgia."

His manner had a hint of invitation, and Eli, who was attracted by the stranger, and was also a little resentful of the dignified seclusion imposed upon him by Ah Fong, took the hint, and together he and Wen-Yen returned to the warm and cheerful kitchen, where they sat down near the stove.

Ah Fong, who was washing dishes in the background, flashed an approving smile as they came in.

"My friend, Mr. Fong, tells me that you are interested in the history and literature of my country," the visitor said in his smooth, distinct tones. "He regrets that he does not speak classical English, and I regret it too. The party in China with which I am connected, and with whose aims Mr. Fong is also in sympathy, are anxious that a knowledge of our civilisation should be spread both among the people of this continent and those of Europe. We are also anxious to obtain employment for as many of our young men as possible in foreign lands, particularly in those countries whose institutions are of a democratic nature. We are essentially a democratic people, as you are doubtless aware, but of late my country has fallen on evil times. Certain of us, especially in Southern China, have great hopes of better things arising. It is for that reason that I am travelling in Canada at present, and visiting my countrymen who are scattered about, for to build well one must set the foundations deep and wide."

Eli was astonished. No one had ever spoken to him after this fashion before. It seemed to him almost ridiculous that the ideas of cooks and hired men could be worth considering when the reformation of a great Empire was in question, but there was nothing else ridiculous about Wen-Yen.

His steady, dark eyes held Eli, and gradually as he listened to the level tones of the Chinaman's voice, he

divined beneath the impassive manner the power and fire of a great character swayed by an unselfish ideal. Divined it, for Ah Wen did not say much more on the subject of his political aspirations. He turned the conversation to other matters, speaking of the ancient poets and philosophers of his land, and touching upon some of the more striking episodes in her history. It was late when Eli left the kitchen, and far on into the night he heard Wen-Yen and Fong talking together.

I know that evening's conversation made a great impression upon Eli, and he lived long enough to learn something of the effects of the vast and patient propaganda carried on by this stranger and others such as he, when, many years afterwards, all the world was ringing with the first news of the Chinese Revolution. At present we of the West have our hands full of our own mismanaged affairs; what the work begun so long ago may ultimately mean for Wen-Yen's countrymen and ours, does not yet appear.

Next morning when Eli came to breakfast, the visitor was already preparing to depart. He turned to greet Eli.

"Mr. Fong tells me that his master permits him to receive a friend as a guest now and then," he said. "May I ask you to thank Mr. Martindale for me when he returns? Also I have ventured to leave a book that I think will interest you. It is written in Chinese, but if you wish, Mr. Fong will translate some of the passages to you, and will mail it on to me when you have finished with it. May I say that our conversation last night was a great pleasure to me? Thank you and good-bye!"

He bowed, and getting into the sleigh with the Indian, departed on his way down the valley.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HOME-COMING

"Suppose you look at the Great Way you will not see it, for it is neither red nor blue, and it has no shape nor any body at all. It makes no sound, yet it understands how to call so that everything will answer. Every day till the end of your life you may ask men and women, and kings and clergymen, but you cannot learn about the Great Way from other people. It is very near you, but very hard to find. So long as your mind is full of cleverness you will never begin to know that great emptiness, but when you throw away your cleverness, throw everything away, then you are like a bucket that a man puts down into the river. Suppose the bucket is empty, then the water will soon fill it. The Great Way is like water. Water is weak, but because it is weak it is stronger than rocks, stronger than everything. Water does not want to be a chief or a king; it goes down into low places and valleys. Bad men and good men, and trees, and cows, and dogs, and the ground all drink water, and water makes them live. It gives to them all alike, and makes no favourites. The Great Way is like water, and a very good man is like the Great Way."

—EXTRACT FROM THE BOOK OF WEN-YEN.

LATE hours, and perhaps a touch of homesickness, had put Ah Fong into a bad temper.

When Eli translated Martindale's letter for the old man's benefit, he merely snorted, and began to rake out the stove with some violence. In doing so he knocked his knuckles and exclaimed "*Makahi*" very loudly, followed

by a long string of Chinese words, evidently bad ones, spoken in a lower tone.

He then arose and standing over Eli, shook his finger threateningly.

"Suppose that woman come here, Nightingale no more boss. That woman *she* boss. Aller hwhite woman aller same. More better me go my China."

He took the buckets and clattered down to the creek for water while Eli harnessed the horses to the sleigh. As they were driving through the meadows Ah Fong broke silence.

"Suppose that woman she come, what-um name?"

Eli said her name would be Mrs. Martindale.

"Me call-um that one more name 'Missen Nightingalo'?"

"Clonas you waw-waw Ma'am, suppose you more likee?" (Perhaps you would prefer to say 'Ma'am?') Eli suggested maliciously.

"Halo!" snapped Ah Fong, and Eli heard him practising the "one more name" under his breath, like a cross old parrot, all the way to the stacks.

That night the Chinaman, now restored to good humour, produced the book Wen-Yen had left and administered a dose from it as prescribed by that "very good doctor."

The book consisted of several slim paper volumes enclosed in a kind of cardboard case fastened with little ivory pegs. With it were some loose sheets of English MSS., perhaps translations by Wen, perhaps original writings by him.

Every night Ah Fong solemnly read a portion from the Chinese section, often with quaint comments, and Eli became greatly interested. His was, I think, a naturally philosophic mind, and this was his first introduction to

any writings of the sort, with the exception of parts of the Bible.

The Bible, however, has been so enhaloed and at the same time made so overfamiliar, that to most men brought up as Eli had been, it has become quite sterile and inert as an intellectual leaven, even in cases where it still exercises sway over the emotions. I am told this does not hold good north of the Tweed, but I have no first hand knowledge of how the matter stands with the Scotch, being myself very much of a Southron.

It makes me smile when I think of the method by which Eli was introduced to the often abstruse doctrines of Chinese philosophy. I have a vision of Ah Fong, spectacled and clad in blue jean slops, sitting at the kitchen table hing-honging out the original in classic fashion, and translating it paragraph by paragraph into his own peculiar mixture of tongues.

Certainly our Western philosophers seem to find much comfort in a jargon, but I doubt if even they would not prefer plain English to Fongese.

I believe that the ancient Chinamen never quite understood the advantages to be obtained by using highly technical language when expounding a knotty subject to the uninitiated. They do not seem to have realised that such language may be used both to add to the impressiveness of the lecturer and also as a kind of intellectual putty wherewith to stop up cracks in the framework of an argument. On the contrary, the ancient Chinese appear to have written as simply as they could, any difficulties disciples find in their works would seem to arise more from the depth of the thought and the incompleteness of the records than from any ornamental complexities of expression. However, I may be much mistaken in this; for I do not, alas, read Chinese with any facility, and

have never made a formal study of philosophical systems, ancient or modern.

I do, however, offer my sincere compliments to Ah Fong, for in spite of all difficulties he seems to have been able to make most of Wen-Yen's selection fairly clear to his pupil, as is proved by the copy book which lies before me as I write. In this, after one of his "Evenings with the Best Authors," Eli was wont to write down anything that particularly struck him. Some of these notes, though in his hand, are evidently not of his composition. They are probably transcriptions of the manuscript portions written by Wen-Yen, but the most part are very simple renderings in English of Fong's translations of the originals. I can catch the Chinook turn of many of the phrases, and perhaps to other readers these extracts might seem both trite and dull, but to Eli they opened a new world of thought. I fancy, however, that he dealt with these maxims of the Sages in a manner that may be compared with the way in which makers of sugar-candy use strands of cotton; he immersed them in his own fluid ideas which crystallised upon and around them, and in so doing often took on forms bearing but a vague resemblance to the strings provided by the book of Wen-Yen.

Both from his notes and from what Eli has told me, I gather that this must have been a kind of thesaurus or anthology of passages culled from widely different sources. Eli, however, had it firmly fixed in his mind that the whole, or nearly the whole of what Ah Fong read to him, was by Confucius, though he maintained that a few passages, all very characteristically Confusian, but which he disliked, were *not* directly to be attributed to that venerable man.

"There was a lot in the book about carts having to follow in the ruts of all the carts that had gone before, and how many years a man ought to stay in mourning for

his relations, and things of that sort, that I don't believe Quonfootser ever said," he told me once. "Whenever a big man dies, a lot of little men are sure to begin writing books to explain what the big man really meant, which, of course, a little man could never know. I expect that's how a heap of such foolishness got put in."

On the other hand he certainly decked his idol with adornments snatched from other and alien divinities. For instance, he has quoted to me whole passages which sounded uncommonly like some of the less reprobate sayings of Yang Choo, and, perhaps by way of antidote, others of a distinctly Mihist tendency, blandly attributing them all to Confucius in a manner to make the very bones of Mencius and the orthodox commentators turn in their highly respectable graves.

But among the company of Wise Men who spoke from the book of Wen-Yen, there was one teacher, older and more august than even Confucius himself, to whom I believe Eli owed more than to any other. In my friend as I knew him, and in much that he said and refrained from saying, did or left undone, I have thought I could trace an influence from the great, sad, joyful, yet serene spirit of Lao Tsu. It is an honour of this philosopher therefore that I have set down the extract from Eli's note book that heads this chapter. Through the translation and retranslation, and the almost infantile style of the resulting English, I hear an echo from that "Treatise of Virtue and the Great Way" which those who know it well are apt to think one of the noblest and most inspiring books in the world.

But enough of these high matters. Eli was only beginning to think consciously along such lines as I have indicated. His work was among Martindale's beeves. Let us therefore turn once more to the homely doings at the ranche in the Tsilicot valley.

The weeks slipped on and a sharp spell of cold set in. The thermometer fell to nearly forty below zero, and it became necessary to feed all the cattle. This meant much extra work for Fong and Eli.

Between them they devised various ingenious methods for economising hay, and the lengthening days gave them more opportunity for work afield, but at the same time shortened the evenings, so that the book of Wen Yen was not so much in request as before. One or two early calves appeared, and they and their mothers needed extra attention. Then the weather moderated somewhat and the date fixed for Martindale's return drew near. Indians had already brought up some of the freight, and Ah Fong began to scrub and polish, and enlisted Eli's help whenever the latter could spare time from outdoor work. Harrison came over and there were anxious discussions as to whether the snow would still be in good condition for sleighing, since travelling during a thaw is not an agreeable experience in that country.

It was arranged that Harrison should take his sleigh, a roomy and comfortable one, down to meet the stage, which was to bring the bride and bridegroom as far as the post office, so that Martindale might drive his wife home.

On that Thursday Eli had to feed the cattle by himself for Ah Fong was making preparations for a sumptuous feast.

He filled all the stoves with logs till they roared again, and even went so far as to go out and brush away the snow from some Kanicanic scrub which grew near by, returning in triumph with branches of the graceful ever-green which he set in pickle bottles and disposed upon the dining table and about the sitting room. Then he pinned a red "good luck paper" upon the house door and returned with fervour to his cooking.

About sunset a cheerful voice was heard shouting from

the corner where the road skirted a sandy bluff before reaching the yard.

"Hoi! Hoi! Youp!" it called, as if driving cattle, and Ah Fong and Eli came out in time to open the gate and welcome Martindale and his wife home.

All that could be seen of the latter at first was a smallish bundle of wraps, and two very bright eyes under a fur cap.

Martindale jumped out, shook hands with the two men, and then lifting his laughing lady bodily in his arms, set her down on two absurdly small feet in the snow.

She drew off her mitts and gave a be-ringed little hand first to Eli and then to Ah Fong.

The latter busied himself about the luggage while Eli took the horses to the stable, and Martindale, tucking his wife's hand under his arm, led her indoors.

They all met again in the dining room where Ah Fong, who had blossomed out into a white cotton coat, and had let down his pigtail in honour of the occasion, served the other three with a most imposing banquet, which ended with plum-pudding and treacle tart.

Mrs. Martindale chattered gaily during the meal. She was dressed in some arrangements of soft browns and rose colour, with her delicate rather aquiline features and quick movements, reminded Eli of an English robin.

She had the same alert and dauntless air as that pugnacious bird, he thought, but there was a look of humour about her face, and now and again, a softness in her dark eyes that inclined him to believe her husband had done well for himself in capturing the affections of this vivid creature.

He was glad to think so and said to himself that Martindale deserved his luck.

After supper, or rather, late dinner, he left the young couple to themselves, and went off into the saddle room in

the new house. The stove was burning and the place was warm and snug.

He threw himself down in a chair, but soon rose from it again. He took a piece of buckskin and rubbed up one of the bits hanging there; he liked to keep the saddlery in order and objects in their proper places; everything of the sort had been in rather a mess when he came, and he had tidied the ranche up a good deal since he had been left in charge. He was now to inhabit one of the "bachelor hutches" as Martindale called the new rooms, and he set the door open so that his bedroom might warm up before he went to sleep. Then he drifted off, rather aimlessly, into the kitchen.

Presently Martindale strolled in whistling, his delighted terrier at his heels. He stooped to stroke the nearest cat, who purred politely but did not disturb herself.

"That's what I like about cats," he said to Eli, "they always know exactly what they want, and also when they have it."

He looked round the kitchen smiling.

"Well," he said, "I've had a very jolly holiday, and thanks to you and Ah Fong, everything seems to have gone on all right without me here . . . but—it's nice to be home."

Eli smiled in reply though with a little contraction of his eyebrows. He wondered if his neuralgia was coming on again; luckily there was still plenty of the peppermint stuff left in the phial given to him by Wen-Yen.

He bade Martindale good-night and went off to the new house, but it was some time before he slept.

CHAPTER XXIX

SPRING ON THE RANCHE

SOME ten days afterwards Martindale and Eli, returning from the meadows, found Mrs. Martindale ironing in the kitchen, while Ah Fong chopped wood outside.

"Dolly," said Martindale, "put those things away. To-day is a high and auspicious occasion, and it befits you to keep it holy. *The crows have come.*"

"I'm not at home," replied Mrs. Martindale promptly. "I'm never at home on ironing days. Tell them that I receive on alternate Thursdays from three till six."

She shook the garment she had finished, folded it daintily, and spreading out another, set to work thereon with deft movements. Such tasks were new to her, but already she had attained to some skill with her tool, and her husband watched her proudly, though he answered her with an air of lofty severity.

"You won't talk about crows in that flippant way when you've been here a winter or two, my good girl."

"Why?" she asked, pressing the iron into the pleats of a sleeve.

"Because in this country the Crow is the Harbinger of Spring."

Mrs. Martindale paused, her iron in her hand.

"Spring!" she said. She looked out of the window, and her eyes widened.

"Yes," he answered; "Spring with birds and flowers and all complete, no snow till next time, and green grass for the cattle to eat, and for you and me to go riding

over. It's never far behind the crows, and it comes with a rush when it does come. 'Tis a pleasant season, as the poetry-books say, but it doesn't last long here."

"And that's the pity of it everywhere," she said dreamily.

Then she set down the iron on the stand with a little clash.

"Come out in the sunshine, Ted. I've all the rest of my life to iron in. Ah Fong can finish this lot or no, just as he pleases. To-day we'll go forth and associate with the crows, you and I."

She smiled and held out her arms for her husband to help her into her coat which was hanging near by.

As Eli turned away to put fresh logs on the stove, he saw Martindale bend down and imprint a swift kiss on the tip of his wife's ear.

Then they ran through the yard, hand-in-hand, like a couple of children.

Indeed they seemed like children to Eli, practical young folk though they were.

Often they seemed to play at talking like a game, tossing words about so quickly that he could hardly follow them. They made him laugh—and yet—— Surely he did not grudge them their youth and their fun? How happy they were, those two!

The snow was beginning to melt in patches, and flights of duck were constantly passing up the valley toward their breeding grounds. The geese followed, big geese and brant geese, and swans honk-honking as they flew. Then the little blue birds arrived. Eli heard Mrs. Martindale's cry of delight when for the first time she caught sight of one fluttering outside the window. She and Martindale were constantly searching the meadows now for the fresh calves. They were both beautiful riders, and she delighted in driving cattle on her clever pony.

Ah Fong was most gracious, and before long favoured her with some of his best stories; she was quick to pick up his tongue, and used to pass his examinations with flying colours.

"Him allersame Nightingalo," she would say, but when it came to the turn of the heroine she always described her as "that very, very good China woman aller same ME," and Ah Fong used to chuckle with delight.

One day, however, when he had partaken freely of both duck and beef for supper, the Chinaman had a fit of ill-humour which lasted for two days, during which he cooked extremely ill.

Mrs. Martindale said notmng, but on the second afternoon Eli found her in the saddle-room with the medicine chest and a row of bottles before her, mixing something in a tumbler. Martindale was lounging near, laughing.

"Look out, Buckle," he said. "The missus is ripe for any crime. She'd poison you as soon as look at you, in her present mood. Dolly, what on earth are you mixing now?"

"Bronchial troches, Worcestershire sauce and water at present," she answered, "but I think a little Gregorys powder might improve the flavour, and I suppose half a teaspoonful of methylated spirit and a wee pinch of permanganate of potash couldn't do anyone serious harm, could they? Look! Isn't it *lovely*?"

Martindale looked and shuddered.

Mrs. Martindale seized a packet in a blue paper with a little cry.

"That's it," she said. "That's just what I want. I'll put the Seidlitz powders in at the last moment, the fiz will bring out the taste of the other things nicely!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Martindale.

"You can come and see, or rather, hear it administered, if you like to stop very quietly in the dining-room and will

promise not to show yourselves," she said, and bore off the glass and powders, a wicked light shining in her eyes.

Martindale beckoned Eli, and they both followed her into the dining-room.

Mrs. Martindale went on into the kitchen, leaving the door ajar behind her.

"Ah Fong," they heard her say sweetly, "I'm afraid you sick."

"What-er-matter you?" came Ah Fong's voice in grumpy surprise.

"I look see you. Yesterday, to-day I see you. You hyu sick, me *very* sorry. I fix you some medicine—you drink him, then you go you sleep house. Me cook-um dinner to-day, to-morrow you more better. See!"

"Me halo sick, halo one sick," Ah Fong protested uneasily.

Martindale choked back his mirth.

"If he isn't now, he will be if he drinks that devil's cocktail," he murmured to Eli.

"Me look—see you eye, me look—see you nose, you delate hyu sick, *me* savvy." The voice of Mrs. Martindale took on a note of grave pity. "Better drink now, to-morrow maybe you *more* sick, suppose you halo drink. See! Me put two more icta inside."

They heard the tinkle of a spoon and then the faint sizzle of effervescence.

That and the rich magenta colour of the draught evidently impressed Ah Fong. He had always a secret leaning towards patent medicines as his temptress had discovered.

"You drink-um quick, hyu quick!" she said.

There was a tense pause, then a sudden splutter, and the voice of Ah Fong crying "PP—fu—fu—i!" after which came the sound of the dipper clanking against the drinking water pail, and a noise of gulping.

"That one velly good medicine, hyu strong."

The voice of the dispenser still fell sweetly, but with a faint inflection of triumph.

"Now me cook-um dinner."

"Me cook-up all light." Ah Fong's voice hinted perplexity.

"What you cook?"

"Maybe beefo, litta potato."

A silence.

"Fly potato."

"Nightingalo likee soup, likee pudding. *Me* cook-um dinner. To-morrow me give you medicine one more time."

"*Halo!*" Ah Fong's voice was almost agonised. Then he surrendered at discretion. "Me fix-um soup, me fix-um pudding," he announced.

"All right," there was no doubt as to the triumph in the tone this time—"me savvy that one hyu strong medicine."

She turned towards the door, but Martindale had already fled, and was choking in the saddle-room.

"Oh, Dolly, you *are* a little devil! I'd never have married you if I'd known what you were really like," Eli heard him say, as his spouse rejoined him.

But dinner that night was good.

Martindale was the first of the "Army failures" to marry, and the other three or four rode over, one by one, to pay their respects. They came long distances, and generally stayed to dine and sleep. Eli used to hear the Martindales and their guests laughing in the sitting-room after dinner. Sometimes he would be invited to join the party, and now and then would do so for a while, but generally he preferred to make some excuse and go to his own quarters. He was restless and unhappy, he could scarcely tell why. It was as though a part of himself

that he had kept drugged or benumbed since the tragedy at Bourne, was recovering sensibility against his will. His neuralgia was not severe, but it returned from time to time, and his sleep was broken by dreams. Sometimes he talked to Ah Fong, but though that worthy did not work so much afield now, he had more to do in the house of an evening, and Eli would look over his notes and the English portions of Wen-Yen's book alone, but he did not read much, he was always fonder of thinking than of reading other men's thoughts, and now his own hurt him.

Then one morning he awoke feeling that something was changed in the valley.

The air was warm and humid, the sky blue, and rolling masses of white clouds threw moving shadows over meadow and hill, while the pine trees were tossing their branches and making a noise like the sea.

The Chinook wind was blowing, the great soft wind from the south-west that brings the Spring back once more from beyond the mountains. Soon every creek and runlet was full of water from the melting snows of the valley and foothills. The first flowers rushed into bloom and the cattle, bellowing with delight, were turned out from the fenced pastures to gaze on the young herbage of the range.

Perfume came back to the world, resinous odours from the pines and scrub, and the smell of wet earth and running water.

It was mid-April now, the sun was hot and bright again and the woods full of birds.

Martindale came in to lunch one day, laughing, but a little vexed.

"That old sinner, Inoutsin," he said, "he's squatted on the upper range on my land, got his friends to help him, I suppose. I doubt if rubbing a grease lamp would produce a Djinee. Anyway, Demmert tells me that the old

scamp has built himself a lordly pleasure shaque on the hill, and not content with that, has thrown down four or five panels of my fencing, and his horses and his wife's horses, and the horses of all their dusky relations, are eating out the lower meadow. Get into your habit, Dolly, and after lunch you and I and Buckle will ride down and mend the fence, and then you shall both come and help me to give him notice to quit."

"I thought the Siwashes were supposed to live on their own reservation down by the Rancheree," said Eli.

"So they are," Martindale answered. "The Government has given them some of the best land in the country, free of taxes, and I'll be shot if I'll have them on my place that I've bought and paid for. I'll pitch into Inoutsin with the strongest brand of official blue paper, and put a big red seal in the corner to boot, if he won't listen to reason. I'm not a J.P. for nothing, these times, I'll have him to know."

Mrs. Martindale laughed.

"I do admire you in these darkly determined moods of yours, Ted dear," she said.

They rode some five miles down the sunlit valley, chased out the Siwash horses and mended the fence.

"Now we'll go and grind the faces of the poor," Martindale announced as he remounted his horse.

They found the log hut tucked away in a warm fold of the side hills, and the aged and blear-eyed Mrs. Inoutsin dressed in a rabbit-skin blanket, sunning herself on the door sill.

"Inoutsin stop?" asked Martindale.

She blinked at him and said nothing.

He repeated the question, and she at last made a slight gesture with her hand towards the interior of the house.

At that moment her husband appeared—a little brown

old man. He hesitated a moment and then decided to put a good face on the matter.

"Clahowyah, Marlintail," he said cheerfully. He spoke a certain amount of English, and was evidently proud of the accomplishment.

"Look here," said the cruel landlord, "what for you build-um shaque this place? This is my illahee, *my* land."

Inoutsin turned and looked at the hut, then again faced his visitor.

"Him good house. Yas, me build-um," he replied mildly.

"No matter. You halo stop this place, you go back Rancheree."

Inoutsin became extremely unintelligent.

"Halo cumtux" (I don't understand), he said, in purest Chinook, and the conversation proceeded in that tongue, which neither Mrs. Martindale nor Eli understood at all well. Inoutsin listened to Martindale with a politely bored expression, threw in a few evidently pointed remarks from time to time, and countered the other's finest flights of oratory with a stolid "Halo cumtux."

Mrs. Inoutsin treated Dolly to a leisurely and critical inspection, gave her a toothless smile, and relapsed into contemplation.

The spring mosquitoes were biting hard, and presently Mrs. Martindale slipped from her horse, and invited Eli to keep the pests away with a green branch while she gathered flowers.

They returned after a while to find Martindale and his adversary again talking so-called English.

"Well, suppose you stop, you tell aller Siwash halo bring-um horse here," the oppressor was saying plaintively.

"Oh, yas, just two-three horse come all right. What-

er-matter? You hyu rich white man, hyu cow, hyu money," was Inoutsin's reply.

Martindale dismounted to lift his wife into her saddle.

"I suppose I'll have to buy the cabin from the old ragamuffin," he sighed, as they rode away. "One can't be too hard on a pair of tottery old things like that."

Mrs. Martindale shook her head.

"Ted, I'm disappointed in you," she murmured sadly. "I thought I had married a strong, stern, if not silent man. I'm afraid Mrs. Inoutsin's charms have beguiled you."

"I'll race you across the flat," was her husband's answer—"whoop—yah!"

The two vanished with a drumming of hoofs in a cloud of dust, and Eli on his elderly "buckskin" was left to ride back alone.

CHAPTER XXX

A SONG AND A MORNING DREAM

MAY brought the snow water from the mountains down the river, and Martindale and Eli were at work every day making the sluices and irrigation ditches ready to flood the hay meadows in June. Ah Fong, like most of his nation, had a quick eye for levels, and often came with them, leaving Mrs. Martindale to tend the house.

She was a quick worker, and accomplished her tasks easily enough.

She was also something of a musician, and had brought a guitar from England, since pianos had not yet reached the upper country.

I met her down at the coast in after years, and have heard her sing at tea parties in Victoria, feasts at which she was much in request, though she attended them with what she herself described as "mitigated rapture."

She often made little songs and sang them to her own accompaniment, and since she was a happy woman, these were generally plaintive ditties enough. She had a small voice, so sweet that Eli never knew if to hear her sing gave him most pleasure or pain. Now and again, too, she would do him some little careless kindness that hurt in the same way.

One evening when Harrison and his partner, Demmert, had dined at the ranche, the party took their chairs out into the mosquito-proof verandah, and while Mrs. Martindale fitted a new string to her instrument, Demmert

asked Martindale if he remembered a certain Murdoch who had worked at a neighbouring ranche a year or so before.

"He's back in the country now looking for a job," Harrison said; "we've taken him on to do a bit of fencing. I wish we could afford to keep him all the summer."

"He's a good man," Martindale agreed, "handy with cattle and a steady worker."

Mrs. Martindale struck a few chords, and then began a song Eli had not heard before. He was sitting near her, and caught every word of the little ballad.

The pine trees in the forest, the whole night through,
Were sighing for a sorrow not their own;
I lay beneath their branches, and sighed for you,
And wished the dark and lonely hours had flown.

O Love of mine!

Lost Love of mine!

The wild swans by the river, at break of day,
Were lifting gilded pinions to the light;
I heard their mournful voices float far away,
And wished the weary morn were sunk in night.

O Love of mine!

Dead Love of mine!

So she sang, and when she ended, a silence fell upon the little company.

Then Demmert asked for another cup of coffee, and Eli rose from his chair saying that he would tell Ah Fong to bring a fresh supply.

"Sing us something cheerful now, Dolly," Martindale said as Eli entered the house; and he heard her begin an absurd imitation of an old Spanish peasant woman warbling a love song in a cracked and nasal tone.

He found Ah Fong in the dining-room, clearing the table and chuckling.

"Suppose that one girlee sing aller time me larp," he said joyfully.

Eli gave his message, and went out and up through the woods. He walked fast at first, stumbling in the loose sand of the foothills; then turned westward, and after a while came to a rocky spur overlooking the valley and sat down.

Things could not go on like this, he thought, and then he asked himself squarely what it was that he wanted.

Below him he saw a light glimmering from a window of the house—one little light all alone in the grey evening, and he caught his breath with pain, remembering one other night in May when he had lingered beneath a lit window in Bourne village and vowed to make a home for Mary.

Well! Why not again? Why should he not take his year's wages, and, returning to England, find some laughing girl to make him a home such as other men took joy in?

But even with the question came the answer.

He could not. The door was shut.

It had closed suddenly that February morning, twelve years ago, and since then, of his own will, he himself had locked and double-locked the gate.

He had known the good of that part of life, and he had known the evil, and now both the good and evil stood as sword-bearing angels between him and the Earthly Paradise, warning him that henceforth his road lay onward with no returning.

It might not have been so for other men. Eli knew that it was so for him.

A riot of coyote laughter sounded from the woods across the valley, a sleepy wild duck chuckled from her nest on the river bank, and the light of the setting moon turned the young cottonwood leaves to trembling silver as he went back to the ranche.

Though he slept well that night he had an odd dream at dawn; he thought that he was in the little valley where

the survey party had camped, it was full day, but the mountain of the triple peaks was, as he had last seen it, shining with rosy light.

He crossed the river and went down to the lake, two nuns were standing by the Indian grave, they were Sister Clara and the Reverend Mother, the former was peering between the logs of the tomb.

"He is there," she said; "I can see his eyes."

The Reverend Mother began to answer, but as she spoke, he found it was not the Reverend Mother but Mrs. Thorogood.

"And if he do be a ghost, 'tis his own grave he's hauntin', as a gentleman should," she was saying. "'Tisn't he that would be hangin' round the houses of the livin', whickerin' and whinin' in the night, tryin' to warm himself at another man's fire."

At her words he awoke, but it was as though he could still see the eyes of Sister Clara looking at him with a strangely intent expression.

He dressed and went out and into the sunlight, and as he set about his work he knew whither he should turn his steps ere long.

The next day as he and Martindale were walking home from the meadows he spoke.

"I heard Mr. Demmert saying that there was a man at their ranche who would be wanting a job."

"Murdoch—yes," answered Martindale, a little surprised.

"I've been meaning to ask your advice about taking up a place I saw when I was with Dod," Eli continued. "I thought maybe you might like me to stay on for the hay-ing, but if you can get another man, and it's no inconvenience to you, I think I'd better go there soon."

He spoke with some constraint, and Martindale was silent a moment.

"I hoped you might have stayed on here a while," he said at last.

Eli flushed.

"I'd have liked to, sir," he replied. He did not usually call anyone "sir," it was not the custom of the country, and Martindale gave him a quick look.

They walked on.

"Look here! Is there anything wrong?" the rancher asked after a while.

"There is and there isn't," Eli answered, "but what is wrong, is wrong with me."

Martindale saw that his companion was distressed.

"I'm sorry," was all he said, but he looked puzzled.

They were approaching the house now and Ah Fong came out on the verandah.

"Wash muck-a-muck," he shouted in a voice of thunder. It was his method of announcing that the time had come to get ready for dinner.

Eli stopped at the saddle room door.

"You and Mrs. Martindale have been very kind to me. I . . ." He hesitated, and the two looked at each other, then Martindale smiled.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm sorry you are going, that's all. But naturally, if you know of a good meadow you're wise to drive in your stakes now. The country is sure to fill up soon. I think you ought to do well with ranching. I'll ride over with you some day if you like and we'll have a look at the place."

He went on into the sitting room and Eli sought his own quarters.

It was Thursday, and Martindale had sent an Indian down for the mail. The messenger returned with the letters and a parcel, just as dinner was ending.

Mrs. Martindale's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, the dear people!" she said. "They have timed my birthday letters wonderfully, haven't they?"

She opened the letters one after another and then untied the parcel.

"Mother's present. How nice!" she cried, as she took a pretty summer dress out of a box, and held it up, laughing with pleasure. She turned to Ah Fong who came in at that moment.

"Look see what my Mama send me," she said.

The Chinaman felt the thin cotton between a thumb and finger.

"Umph!" said he. "What for you Mama potlatch you one paper flock? Silk more better."

"Me like a paper frock, Ah Fong. Me Mama she send-um because me birthday come to-morrow."

"How old you?" demanded Ah Fong.

"Twenty-three," replied Mrs. Martindale.

Ah Fong snorted.

"Suppose me stop my China an' me birfday come, me send me Mama one flock. Me Mama *she* have velly hard job that day, halo me."

Dolly looked at the moralist very kindly, though her English upbringing caused her pretty colour to deepen a shade at his words. She folded the dress anew, touching it tenderly.

Martindale smiled.

"I shouldn't be surprised if there were another present for a good girl in my cupboard," he said. "Wait till to-morrow, greedy," he added, as she jumped up from her seat.

"I won't wait another minute," she answered and they went out together, squabbling as usual.

Eli walked down to the stables, and returning after about half an hour, lingered by the yard fence watching the dying sunset.

Presently Mrs. Martindale came out and joined him.

"Here are your gloves. I've mended them for you," she said, and then turned to look at the sky.

"What a lovely night!" she exclaimed, and stood silent awhile. Then she turned towards him.

"My husband tells me that you are thinking of leaving us."

"Yes," Eli answered. He began to pick the bark off the log on which he was leaning.

"I'm sorry," she said gently, and again there was a silence.

Suddenly Eli spoke without looking at her.

"Mrs. Martindale, you told Ah Fong that you would be twenty-three to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow." There was a hint of whimsical regret in her tone.

He paused a moment, then spoke again.

"My wife died just before I was twenty-three," he said. She understood in a flash.

"Oh!" she whispered, drawing in her breath on a quick sigh, then broke out suddenly, "Mr. Buckle, how you must have *hated* us often, Ted and me."

He looked at her then and saw that her eyes were dewy.

"But—but we couldn't help being happy," she added wistfully.

"I hope you will always be happy—both of you," he said. "I wanted to tell you because I was afraid you and your husband might . . ."

She interrupted him.

"It was selfish and stupid of me not to see that there was something amiss—but perhaps Ted guessed."

Eli was looking westward up the valley again.

"It's not your fault. How could it be? You have been very kind—that's why I had to tell you."

Very shortly he gave her an outline of his story. It was the first time he had spoken of Mary since he had left Bourne.

"So I've been running away from myself for twelve years," he ended, "and it's no use. Now I'm going off alone to have things out with myself if I can. I can't make plain what I mean . . . but . . ."

"But I think I know," she said.

They heard the house door open.

"Will you tell your husband?" Eli asked. "Somehow this afternoon I couldn't say anything right. I hope he'll understand I didn't want to leave."

"Ted is good at understanding," she answered, and then Martindale joined them and they began to talk of other things.

VI: AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

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VI: AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

CHAPTER XXXI

BUCKLE'S MEADOW

The mountains stand so white and high
Where foot of man falls never,
But there the lonely waters lie,
That look to Heaven for ever.
There no one but the eagle goes
To watch them gloom or glitter,
And no one but the thirsty ibex knows
If they be sweet or bitter.

Eyes have looked on me, strange and clear
As glacier waters gleaming,
Silences that my heart can hear
Have turned my days to dreaming.
Therefore I go the fawn's wild way,
And bid the eagles guide me,
Unknowing of what dear or dreadful day
Shall set my Soul beside Thee.

—A HILL SONG.

SO it was that Eli, that errant knight, turned at last toward the Lady Solitude, and took her for his bride.

The life of an anchorite is a fairly laborious one in a cold country devoid of pious villagers. Not that summer at Buckle's Meadow, as his place came to be called, is a cool season. Far from it, and Eli built his hermitage, fenced his pasture, put in his sluices, and dug a little patch of garden, all in the sweat of his brow.

He made hay too, for Martindale had been struck by the capabilities of the place, and offered to send some cattle up to the meadow "on shares," an arrangement by which the new settler would be able in time to breed up a herd of his own. During the years this herd was increasing, he was to winter some of Martindale's steers for payment in cash.

At first Eli had aid from Siwashes. For some reason they worked well for him, not because he paid them more than other settlers were wont to give; but when the hay was safe in the stacks, the two log huts that served for house and stable built, and some indispensable enclosures finished, he dismissed his Indians and lived alone, making improvements as he found the time.

His first visitors were three young women from a Siwash fishing camp many miles away. I fear they were not very exemplary damsels. They dismounted from their ponies and clung each to the other in a group. They wore full cotton skirts and tight cotton bodices, moccasins on their feet and bright handkerchiefs knotted under the chin for head gear. When they meant to be very arch they chewed the hems of these handkerchiefs and whispered and giggled together.

It was all in the picture, of course—hermits must expect such visitations—but, had the particular devil who attends to hermits been a fiend of any business capacity, he would, I think, at least have given his emissaries a wash and brush up before sending them forth on their mission. Since he omitted these details, I suppose, he arranged the thing merely for form's sake, and had not much hope of scoring against Eli in such fashion. Neither had the three fascinators after the first half hour.

They mounted and rode away together, and, I believe, passed the word round among such of their friends as were like minded with themselves, that nothing was to be

gained by making advances to the master of the new ranche. Beyond a nod and a Clahowyah he took no notice of you at all.

It also became known that he kept no store and said that he did not "cumtux" furs, but sometimes he was good for half a dollar in return for a prepared rawhide. Fashionable Siwash beauties, however, do not care to steep and scrape rawhide, such disagreeable and laborious tasks being more usually performed by middle-aged or elderly matrons whose husbands are unwilling or unable to provide them with a sufficiency of "klootchman's ictas" or even sugar and beans. (Is it not written in the book of Wen-Yen that "the world is one?")

Somewhat later a very great lady called and left embroidered gloves on Eli. *She* did not nibble handkerchief corners. Her black plaits and severe features were surmounted by a straw man-of-warsman's hat, such as little English boys sometimes wear, the riband of which was inscribed "H.M.S. Victory." She was of stout figure and about forty-five years of age, and arrived on a weedy cayuse, accompanied by a miscellaneous retinue of all ages and a string of pack ponies. She was a chief's daughter and the wife of a degenerate scion of one of the ancient noble families of the Tsilicot tribe, for which reason she introduced herself as "Mrs. Queen," and affected a thoroughly "county" manner, in every way suited to her position.

Now and again hunters visited Eli bringing game, sometimes to sell, sometimes as a *cultus potlatch* or free gift, and he found it necessary to lay in a stock of small presents with which to return these civilities.

Three or four times a year he would go down to Martindale's for supplies, or to take back or fetch cattle; more rarely Martindale would ride over and spend the night at the meadow.

Once when Eli had lived by the lake about two years a strange white man presented himself at the hut. He was on foot and carried a pack, but though he was magnificently built, his chest was hollowed, and his big dark eyes had an unseeing expression. He seemed tired and for a while spoke no word or made any gesture of salutation.

Presently he moved his hand over his face, brushing away the mosquitoes.

"My! Ain't the flies a fright?" he said, and relapsed into silence.

Eli, who let no man, white or coloured, go hungry from his door, guessed the newcomer's need and took him in and fed him.

The traveller stayed two nights, telling vague, crazy tales about diamonds and fine houses, nuggets of gold and mines; mines of every sort of substance from silver to camphor, which he said he had struck very rich out Nanaimo way. He also informed Eli that he knew of two mountains near the Southern Gate, one of pure graphite and the other of pure vermilion, and that he was on his way to stake out claims upon them.

They are an odd crowd, prospectors, mad or sane, but Eli used to declare that he had never met one of the latter kind. As far as his knowledge went, he said, they were "all the sort of folk who'd peck up the golden pavement of the New Jerusalem to look for pay dirt underneath."

This prospector, though his host tried to dissuade him, went on his way towards his El Dorado and probably died among the awful glaciers and precipices of the further range. Eli never knew.

Nor do I know what El Dorado Eli was seeking in his own mind during the long and solitary years he spent upon his ranche. That he found something which made

him different from other men I am sure, but I cannot tell how I have that certainty. It is not because he cultivated any particular eccentricity during the years I knew him, though Anne Brown has always maintained that from his earliest days he was "a bit of a puzzler."

Yet the mountains made their mark, or perhaps it was not only the mountains.

As time went on he became aware that the Indians had a theory about him at the back of their minds, which he could never quite understand. It appeared to be in some way connected with the grave on the lake shore.

He had picked up a little knowledge of rough surgery during his life on sailing ships, and could dress a wound and set a broken bone after a fashion. He also kept a few simple remedies handy, and the Siwashes discovered this, and would now and then come to him for help should any of them fall sick while wandering in his neighbourhood. They have a rather pathetic belief in "white man's medicine," though in their hearts they are not convinced that the power of this almost magic art is ever fully exercised for the benefit of an alien race.

In that pure air wounds heal with surprising quickness if kept reasonably clean, and perhaps more through luck than skill, one or two of Eli's men patients made good recoveries after accidents of some gravity. After this his reputation as a doctor was established, and Siwash women would at times bring their children to him, or ask his aid in their own often cruel ills.

This was at times a pitiful business for him since he knew his own ignorance, but to comfort them he would administer a mild dose of liquorice powder or something equally inexpensive and harmless. As many of the children brought to him were suffering from a diet of dried salmon or "tree grease" (which is the inner bark of fir trees), here also he had some cures to his credit, the more

so as he was now and again able to supplement his medicaments with a little milk during the few days the sufferers camped near his house.

One of his chief difficulties was to obtain any reasonable description of the symptoms of the diseases he was asked to cure.

On one occasion a boy of about twelve years of age was brought to him. Eli felt him over but could not discover anything outwardly amiss, but though the patient did not appear to be in pain, he was evidently much in awe of the doctor. The latter requested to have the seat of the discomfort pointed out to him, and this led to a lively discussion in the Tsilicot tongue between the parents, several relatives, male and female, and the boy himself, which resulted in the declaration that without any doubt whatever the lad was either "lung sick," or had a pain in his leg, no one, least of all the sufferer, could be positive which. Eli gave him some Epsom salts and left him to his family.

That afternoon on his way to the lake, he saw his late patient lurking among the herbage at the mouth of the river. The urchin was armed with an old shot-gun and was so much engaged that he did not notice the rancher's approach.

A wild duck came swimming past, followed by her brood, the boy let fly amongst them and sprang up laughing to see the little fluffy creatures struggling in agony. Eli leant over and wrenched the gun from the marauder's hands. The latter turned, greatly startled, and seeing the flame of anger in the white man's eyes, fled.

Presently an older Indian came down from the side hill and stood by Eli in silence, till he looked up from the work he was engaged upon, and pointing to the gun, told the other to take it away.

The Siwash still lingered.

"You sullux, eh?" he asked at last.

Eli replied with some heat that he *was* angry, and moreover that for a tribe of hunters to kill "duck papoose" so wantonly was foolish, and that anyway he, Eli, would allow no baby creatures to be destroyed on his holding.

They were standing near the Indian grave at the time, and he saw the man glance over his shoulder at the tomb.

"Him aller same, that one," the Siwash muttered. Then he went away and soon after the whole family departed and the rancher was left alone once more.

Some months after he had a visit from a man he had heard Martindale speak of, but whom he himself had not yet seen.

The aborigines of that district are nominally "priest Indians" or Roman Catholics, the Anglican Church shepherds those around Beechcroft and Yale, and there is a tacit agreement between the two denominations that neither shall hunt the other's country. Eli's visitor was a certain Father Dubois, a priest of the former communion, who arrived with his blankets strapped to his saddle, his clerical dress looking oddly unsuited to his surroundings. He appeared about sunset on his way from the Rancheree at Tsilicot mouth to a fishing camp on one of the further lakes. He was a cheerful little Frenchman, as good as gold, and utterly unable to imagine any window into the infinite other than the one he helped to clean with such single-hearted devotion. Heaven undoubtedly extended to him a quite peculiar protection, for though he was devoid of any sense of direction, and North and South were all the same to him, yet when he would get upon a horse and head off impetuously into the wilderness, somehow he always managed to arrive somewhere in safety. It might not be the place to which he had intended to go, but probably it did nearly as well.

Over the shortcomings of his dusky converts Father Dubois was wont to shake his head smiling.

"No, I do not see much improvement as yet," he would say, "but then I have only been among them fifteen years, and they suffer from bad examples sometimes, but that is to be expected. Fifteen years is a short time. They shall die and I shall die, but the life of the Church is eternal."

He accepted Eli's invitation to stay the night, would not sit in the only chair, but perched his little round person on a rough stool and ate his simple meal with relish.

"I can stay in the tents and the huts of my people, and I can eat their food, but to sleep in the beds they make for me—et requires much faith—and perhaps some Keating's Powder would also be good," he announced.

He chattered gaily all the evening, but Eli became aware, with some amusement, that he was being subjected to a pretty close scrutiny by the priest's rather prominent dark eyes, and that the conversational topics touched upon were not chosen quite at random.

Father Dubois was interested in Eli's cures—the poor children suffered much, at times, he said, and the native medicine men were very mischievous characters. It would be advantageous if they could be put down by law, but here in the wilderness, even if there were not other obstacles, a law such as that would be enforced with difficulty. Yes. He had discovered that there had been a witch dance at the camp he was going to, he must speak to his children about that. Had Eli heard if any of his patients had recourse to such practices before coming to him? No? Were furs bringing a good price at present?

When he learned that Eli did not trade in furs, he seemed surprised, and for a moment his manner became

colder, but he cheered up again at the mention of the cattle.

He touched lightly upon the subject of Indian burials, and mentioned the grave on the promontory as one of the first to be made in the upper district, the Tsilicots, before they embraced Christianity, having usually burnt their dead.

The Father himself had been instrumental in persuading the relatives of the man who lay in that tomb to abandon the heathen practice of cremation, to which, said he, some of the older Indians appeared to attach superstitious importance. Yes, Father Dubois had seen the man in question shortly before his death. He was very old, and lived, as a rule, by himself, chiefly in the neighbourhood of Eli's valley. He seemed to have been a person of some influence. The Indians said he could cure diseases, but would never take payment for his services. Had not the Indians spoken of him to Eli? No? Ah well, it was a comfort to think that though the old man had refused baptism himself, the fact that he had been buried and not burnt had helped to break down the prejudices of some of those who survived him.

"You are not of our faith, Mr. Buckle, I believe?" the little priest ended rather suddenly.

Eli smiled and shook his head.

Father Dubois looked at him steadily for a moment, then with a very charming courtesy asked him a direct question. "Was Eli connected in any way with Protestant or other missions?"

This was so unexpected that his host laughed outright, a laugh in which the Father joined heartily.

"I did not know in what direction your religious sympathies might be," he said. "You are not then connected with any of the sects?"

Eli's eyelashes drooped.

"Since you ask me, maybe I'm like the dog in Martindale's funny picture book. I've eaten all my labels. Somehow I like 'em better inside than hanging round my neck."

"Ha! Ha! Cap-it-al, very good," laughed the Father, but he took the hint and ceased his little examination of Eli.

He went away next morning and would have ridden off quite cheerfully in the wrong direction, had not his host set him on the road.

When the latter turned back, the priest looked after him awhile, then shook his head and went onwards. This visitor also felt that there was nothing much to be done with the owner of Buckle's Meadow.

The next callers fared no better.

A week after Father Dubois' departure, Eli, at work on some fencing, suddenly found a tall old Indian and a squint-eyed young one standing at his elbow. They had no horses with them and had come out of the forest as silently as deer.

The old man wore buckskin clothes and a felt hat surrounded by a great wreath of bear's claws.

Eli could speak Chinook well enough by this time, and had even picked up a few words of Tsilicot, so after some beating about the bush, the old Indian intimated that he and the white man ought to be friends since they were both doctors, and then he asked Eli to sell him some medicine to dispense among his own following.

Eli refused, not knowing what havoc the other might work with the drugs.

At this the medicine man took a sack from his attendant, and extracting from it a fox-skin, he held out the fur to Eli.

The latter frowned and took refuge in the old excuse. He did not "cumtux skin."

(I think it was only an excuse, for it is not difficult to learn enough about pelts to trade with success. I believe the old childish hatred of traps and trapping had more to do with his obstinate refusal to deal in furs than he would ever confess to me.)

In vain the medicine man explained that the fox skin was a gift. In vain the squinting youth suggested that an even better *potlatch* might follow, if Eli would *potlatch* medicine in return. Only he must never speak of the transaction to Father Dubois who would set *Lejaub* (i.e. the devil) on them if he learned of these doings.

Presently the old Siwash signed to the young one to desist and pack up the skin again, murmuring something in Tsilicot as he did so.

Eli caught a name that sounded like "Ekuntlun."

"Who is Ekuntlun?" he asked suddenly in the same language.

The youth stretched out his arm towards the lake and was about to answer when the elder checked him.

With a grave salutation he turned away, and Eli then saw that a woman had come out of the forest, mounted and holding two spare horses. She and the medicine man and his follower all rode away into the shadow of the pines and Eli saw them no more.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CHINAMAN'S GARDEN

I HAVE spoken of Eli's visitors, but I have not spoken of the weeks and months of his solitude, when no human visage came between him and the great Mask that we call the Face of Nature, nor any human voice sounded in his ears to confuse those deeper vibrations that must be heard with the heart alone.

There are things of which no man can make truthful report, for speech and song give only a faint echo of that music, and the pencil and chisel but a trace of the life behind that form; a trace as frozen and cold and scarcely more expressive of a living presence than the footprints left by some creature that has crossed over newly-fallen snow.

But among the things of which words may tell, there are many that only those who have lived much out of doors in lonely places know, and I think that even these each man sees and hears differently, according to the direction in which he is led by natural bent.

In Spring and Summer time Eli never tired of watching the birds. They were very bold in that secluded valley, and played their scenes of comedy and tragedy in his presence, for the most part without heeding him at all. At other times it seemed as though they even approved of his neighbourhood, for the big black and white loons would splash and shriek with weird laughter if they saw him bathing, taking him, no doubt, for some strange, pink water fowl, and once a big yellow-legged wader

solemnly danced for him on a bare spot amid the sedges, keeping a bright eye on the human spectator to see how he appreciated the exhibition. The yellow orioles flashed in and out of the thickets at his approach, the demure and thievish "Hudson Bay birds" would hang about him when he ate afield, while now and then their splendid cousins, the blue jays, would flicker through the shadows of the pine trees like sapphire flames. Hawks and pelicans, grouse and herons, these and many more haunted Buckle's lake and meadow in their season, but best of all Eli loved to see the ruby and emerald humming-birds whirring and sparkling about the clumps of wild sunflower he had planted near his home.

Many of the little furry peoples were also friendly enough; the larger beasts were shyer, but now and again a porcupine would hobble across a clearing, or a doe push a sleek head from among the bushes to watch our hermit as he fished.

He shot a doe once, and the dying creature looked at him with such woefully beautiful eyes ere her soft muzzle fell to earth, that he never raised rifle to deer again.

Indeed as the years went on he hated more and more to kill, as is often the case with men who are good observers of wild life, even men who have been drawn to such watching by love of the chase.

After the little adventure of the ducklings, Indians would at times bring him young creatures that they found or caught. These orphans were somewhat of an embarrassment, and Eli often declared that he would have no more foundlings left at his door. He had no time, he said, to feed an infant beaver from a bowl of milk with a bit of a rag, or to curb a tame fawn's morbid appetite for newly-washed socks, neither could he afford enough bread and milk and sugar to keep an unregenerate bear cub in a reasonably good temper.

His protests were perhaps rather half-hearted; at any rate they were useless. When an Indian boy would untie some panting and terrified little bird or beast from his saddle and proffer it with an ingratiating grin, Eli could not bring himself to send the youngling away to be tormented to death by the children of the tribe, or even to turn it loose to perish in the forest. It had to stay with him until it could fend for itself, and would often remain until the mating or migrating instinct took it further and further afield, and a day came when it went and returned no more; by then, as often as not, a fresh waif had been thrown on Eli's charity.

He must at times have owned a queer menagerie.

Mrs. Martindale once described to me how she and her husband camped near Buckle's lake on a duck-shooting expedition, and how she found the anchorite sitting at tea surrounded by strange beasts. She said the effect was something between a Buddhist sacred picture and an illustration from *The Hunting of the Snark*.

In Winter the wild creatures were little about, they were hidden safely or had gone south with the sun, but then strange things might be seen or heard in the sky and the air.

Away to the north, where the uninhabited fir forest stretched a thousand miles to the Arctic Circle, Eli would sometimes watch huge arms of light wheeling slowly among the polar stars. One after another the pale beams would arise, sweep towards the zenith, and vanish as they turned to the Western horizon. They could be likened to spokes of that great wheel of which Eastern sages tell, the wheel to which all creation is bound, and with which spirit and matter (which is but spirit manifested) must revolve until the way of freedom is found.

To the more materialistic fancy of the West it might have seemed as if the searchlights of all the navies in the

world were at play where neither ships nor ocean could be.

There were phantasies too of the eye and ear, less actual perhaps than the Northern Lights, though as arresting to the senses.

During all his first Winter alone, and afterwards from time to time, Eli was haunted by the sound of a bell, a small bell such as a rancher will sometimes hang to the neck of a horse or a cow, or an Indian tie to his sleigh harness, but no beast of Eli's carried a bell, and there was no road upon which a sleigh was likely to pass within twenty miles of his house. Once too, but that was on a night in Summer when the Northern streamers are at rest, a great arch of soft light, like a second Milky Way, hung low over the Southern mountain against a clear sky. It was there when the blue dusk fell, and it was there, unchanged, when Eli woke at midnight and looked out, but he never saw it again.

Living cost him very little. It would have cost him less but that he had to feed as well as pay the Siwashes who helped him with his haying. A few sacks of flour, a little bacon, a bag or two of beans, tea and sugar, and the produce of his own ranche and garden, eked out with such game and wild fruits as the Indians brought him, and an occasional quarter of beef from Martindale's, furnished all the food he needed for himself.

The rough, cheap garments which were sold ready-made at all up-country stores served to clothe him, and for added warmth in Winter he would pay some Indian woman to stitch him a suit of buckskin or rough fur.

Folk who have free access to wild land can always live cheaply if they will; they can often live, after a fashion, without spending anything at all. At first Eli had next to nothing to spend, but his herd increased from year to year,

and after a while he was able to keep a tiny balance at the bank.

Other settlers came to the Upper Tsilicot, but none his way. Still, they might do so, and he decided to save up and buy his first pre-emption from the Government. Land in the wilds could be obtained for about a dollar an acre then, with the expenses of survey in addition. When he held the freehold of his first pre-emption he would have the right to stake out an adjoining claim, but it would be some years yet before he could put by even the small sum the purchase of the first holding would require.

He had been some six or seven years at his meadow when he took occasion to help drive Martindale's steers and a few of his own down to the railway where the band was to be delivered to a dealer.

It was Autumn when food is plentiful and young creatures nearly grown. He turned his last batch of wild pensioners loose to take care of themselves, allowed the calves of his milch kine to run with their mothers and suck at their pleasure, turned his older horses into the meadow by the river, and, mounted on a young skewbald he had bred and broken himself, set forth on the ride of three hundred miles.

At Martindale's he found a new cook, one of Ah Fong's numerous "cousins," installed in the kitchen.

The old man had at last scraped up enough to pay a visit to "his China," and had gone down to Beechcroft a week or so earlier, to collect some debts before starting for his long-deferred holiday.

There was a Martindale son and heir now, who from his first year had exhibited a pronounced liking for the society of Eli. The latter, being by no means a baby worshipper, was a favourite with intelligent and self-respecting children and the four-year-old would solemnly trot about after the forty-year-old, who seemed to take

but little notice of his minute and somewhat silent adorer. Children brought up on a ranche are generally both handy and self-reliant, and Jimmy Martindale was never in the way.

The expedition was to consist of a hired man and a couple of Indians, with Eli in command, since Martindale had strained his leg the day before and could not ride.

The weather was fine, and the journey uneventful, though the dust kicked up by the cattle added to the always hard work of keeping a band of steers together through the forest, and forcing the unwilling beasts to swim the Big River.

The latter operation requires judgment and is sometimes dangerous. Kine have many perverse impulses, most of which seem to lead them towards suicide, and now and again, when a band are in the water, they lose their heads and "mill," as the cowboys call it, swimming round and round in a circle till they drown. Many a man has lost his life in trying to break up such a struggling mob, for one beast alone is not subject to this madness of the herd. The crossing, however, was safely accomplished, and all went well with Eli and his charges. He met the dealer in Beechcroft, and handed over the full tale.

Beechcroft was not an attractive place in those days. It consisted of a scatter of little houses, a couple of stores, the station, a tiny church, and what was reputed to be the worst hotel in the world. These wooden buildings were dumped down on the barren shore of a swiftly-flowing river, while all around rose banks and hills of shale and dust almost devoid of vegetation. Mrs. Martindale once described the setting of the town as "the sort of sand and brown paper country that stuffed birds inhabit," and it is a fairly accurate description.

Eli decided to remain there for a day or two, buy some

clothing, and attend to various odd bits of business, for this was his first visit to a town since he had taken service under Dod.

He heard that a Chinaman lived in a shaque between the railway and the river, who washed for inmates of the hotel, so he walked there on the evening of his arrival with a bundle in his hand. He found the cabin standing in a plot of cabbages and potatoes, for the washerman combined laundry work with the profession of market-gardening.

Eli was about to rap at the door when it opened, and Ah Fong came out. The old man's face was drawn and livid, his healthy brown skin had taken on a yellow pallor, and his gleaming dark eyes were dull.

At the sight of Eli he threw out a hand, and let it fall with a gesture of despair. Eli, shocked at his appearance, asked what ailed him, and why he had not started for the coast.

"No good," Ah Fong answered. "Foonish now. Me no go to my China!"

"What has happened?" asked Eli.

Ah Fong glanced behind him at a smooth-faced fellow-countryman who was ironing at a table.

"Me tell you bimeby," he said.

Eli left his bundle with the washerman, and went out with Ah Fong, and there among the cabbages the old man told his trouble.

It was a long and complicated story, concerning loans and sub-lettings, and something of the nature of a mortgage which Ah Fong held upon the house and market garden, and a tenant, a certain Sang, who had taken to opium and had just drowned himself. The upshot of it was, that instead of finding a sum of ready money waiting for him at Beechcroft as he had expected, Ah Fong was left with some acres of land that no one wished to buy, and

if he could not find a customer at once, he could not go to China.

"Me have one letter just now. Me Mama lite-um. She say she sick, she hyu old, she say 'Come quick.' Me wifco she lite one more letter. She say me son-boy catchee one good makee-learn job suppose me bring money now. What can do? Suppose me no sell, me no have enough money, no go China. Me Mama she die, me son-boy go work aller same coolie. My thinkee some time me foonish—go in liver allersame that one Sang."

The tears rolled out of his eyes. All his long struggle would go for nothing now. For lack of apprenticeship his son, and probably the whole posterity of Ah Fong, might sink to utter ignorance and poverty. No wonder the old man thought of ending his sorrows in the cold rushing stream beyond the cabbages.

Well, a pennyworth of help is better than a pound of pity. Eli's help cost him a good bit more than a penny: it cost him most of what he had just received for his steers: but he bought the garden.

The young man at the ironing-board became his tenant, and paid a small rent with admirable punctuality. Ah Fong, looking twenty years younger, boarded the train for Vancouver, whence he would take ship for his China; and Eli went back to his meadow at the foot of the mountain, having first countermanded his new clothes.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DAVY JONES

SO the seasons went on; white winter and perfumed Spring, summer with the shrilling of myriad crickets, and that hot sound, the clatter of the red- or blue-winged grasshoppers rising from the dusty soil. Then the brief riot of autumn, with the air for wine and for bacchanals, the willows and cotton woods in their brocaded gowns, would sink once more into the cloistered quiet of the snow.

The lake was blue or ruffled or frozen. The river ran milky with glacier drift or slipped past the meadows, shining and singing, to pour down the little rapids into the lake.

Sometimes, as Eli worked afield, when the water spoke clearly again after winter mutterings, a puff of wind would suddenly bring the noise of the riffles towards him, and he would pause, startled, so exactly did the sound resemble the cheering and rejoicing of a distant crowd.

But above all this pageantry of the lower lands stood the great mountain to the south.

Eli came to think of it as keeping a kind of watch. Veiled in mist or cloud, blotted out by darkness or the rain, decked with the colours of noon or sunset, or of dawn, and changing in aspect with every change of season or of light, it yet stood there rooted beneath these semblances, unaltered and alone.

When Eli visited the Tsilicot now he found a difference both in himself and in his neighbours. There were a

few new settlers in the upper valley, rather dour Scotch and Canadians for the most part. Of the original little band of "Army failures," one had sold his place and gone to the States, and one had returned to England. The others were still on their ranches, and cheery as ever, at any rate in public; but everyone was older.

Martindale already showed a few grey hairs, and the bloom on Mrs. Martindale's cheek was less softly brilliant than before. Only Ah Fong, back from China, seemed exactly the same. Probably he already looked as old as he would ever appear to be, though I doubt if his birthdays numbered much more than fifty.

Mrs. Martindale had a piano now, and Mrs. Black at the post office a "parlour organ," and rumours drifted up to Eli that a young man had come into the country who could "chord" upon the latter instrument "real elegant."

No one had anything else to say in favour of this newcomer, though no one seemed to know anything much to his disadvantage, except that he had never been seen to work and lived chiefly among the Siwashes. He had no visible means of support and apparently no real name, but was always known as "Jack the Ripper," to which odious soubriquet he took no objection.

As is the case in most wild districts having but a small and scattered population, the Tsilicot valley is greatly given to gossip. Even before the days of motors and telephones legends ran up and down it with amazing celerity. For a brief while tongues wagged and heads were shaken, then the offender vanished for some months and thereafter was generally ignored. He had never troubled the ranches much and seemed to prefer up country camps even to the Rancherees.

One evening in late summer Eli was riding homeward in the dusk when he saw a red glow among the stems of the pine trees, and heard the singing that accompanies

the Indian game of lahal. Two or three little tents were pitched close to the trail and the squaws were dragging in branches to replenish the fire, around which the gamblers were seated. The players were shuffling their little bone cylinders from hand to hand under the handkerchiefs which were tied bib-wise beneath their chins. Behind each player stood his tilicum or partner, beating sticks together, and singing to distract the attention of the adversary.

(Those who know are of opinion that the words of these songs are enough to fluster anyone, even the least prudish. For my part I can only testify to the harassing nature of the tunes.)

The Tsilicot Siwashes always seemed to be a little in awe of "Buckla," as they called Eli, and uncertain as to how much he understood of their tongue, so the song died down as he approached.

There were three players whom he knew, and one whose face he could not at first see plainly, though he noticed that a considerable number of the sticks used as counters were thrust into the ground by this man's side.

Bidding the party *Clahowryah*, Eli was about to ride onward when the fire flared more brightly and the stranger, turning his head, looked up. It was a white man's face that Eli saw, clean shaven, with long locks of fair hair falling from under the brim of a Stetson hat. Pale eyes looked wonderingly from beneath arched brows, and the mouth—but a shadow fell over that and the chin as another player moved, and Eli rode on with a strange feeling as of one who, stretching forth his hand in a familiar room at night, has touched something unknown in the dark.

The next day about noon he was busy in the house mending some harness. The day was warm and sunny and he was working with his back to the open door, ham-

mering rivets. Not till this noisy part of his task was finished did he become aware of a sound of whistling, very low and sweet, with delicious little runs and trills ornamenting the tune.

He looked up. The white lahal player was leaning against the door post watching him. One thin hand held a befringed and embroidered buckskin glove, the other was stuck in the belt of a buckskin jacket, and Eli noticed that there was squaw work in silk about the front and sleeves.

The newcomer ceased whistling and gave a sudden, brilliant smile, then the face fell back into a kind of wistful gravity, with the eyes held wider open than is common among Englishmen.

"Waal! May I come in?" he said, and did not wait for a reply, but entered and looked round.

The voice was as strange as the face, with something of the vibrant quality of the Indian tone and a marked Canadian twang, but English for all that—wholly English under every disguise.

"So you live here," he said, "all alone."

He turned suddenly.

"Say, hev you got a drink? Oh, Pain-killer will do," he added, as Eli shook his head.

"I have none," the latter answered, "and I used the last of my whiskey to wash out a cut. I can give you milk or tea, that's all. I'll be getting dinner directly, you'd better stop and have some."

"I'm not hungry—I'm dry," the newcomer answered sullenly, but he drew forward a stool and sat down to watch Eli prepare the meal. He took the potatoes after a moment and began to peel them in silence.

Eli looked at him more closely. He was the kind of youth of whom Anglo-Saxons, with their school-boy

shamefacedness in the presence of beauty, are apt to say, "He ought to have pretty sisters."

This man's fair colouring, the ivory sort of fairness that does not burn or tan, perhaps made him seem younger than he was. All the upper part of the face was indeed good to look at, but the mouth was contradiction incarnate. One moment it was fine and firm, the next slack even to coarseness, humorous or sullen, cruel or weak in turn, it would now and again, but very rarely, curve to as perfect a sweetness as that of a child. There was something dreadful, yet pitiful, about that mouth, Eli thought, and even as he watched, the whole face seemed to dull and become that of a very ordinary-looking young "tough."

"I suppose you know my name?" the visitor said, when the potatoes were bubbling on the stove.

Eli paused a moment.

"No," he replied, "I've heard of you, I think, but I've not heard your name."

The other gave an unpleasant little laugh.

"I guess you have, pard. I guess you know well enough what I'm called."

"I said I didn't know your name," Eli answered calmly, and the two looked at each other.

Then the visitor shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh well, have it your own way. Any name'll do. I'm not particular, God knows. You can call me Davy Jones, if you like. One bogey is as good as another, but I don't possess a locker, or anything to put inside one either."

Eli tilted the contents of a saucepan into two plates and set them smoking on the table.

"Draw up your stool and set to, Davy," he said. "Do you use milk in your tea?"

From that time onwards Davy Jones "blew in" as he

called it, when he felt inclined. Sometimes he would stay a couple of nights with Eli, sometimes he would not come inside the house at all. Months might pass and he would not appear, and then he might pay three visits in a fortnight. He was not always an agreeable guest, yet to Eli he was always welcome. He never spoke of his own past or future, but told quaint and unedifying stories by the dozen about a certain Felix Schmertz till after a while Eli began to suspect that this name was only one more pseudonym of the speaker.

His whistling was a delight and one snowy evening he arrived with a cheap fiddle packed in a piece of hide.

When he unwrapped it the tail-piece was broken and the strings in a tangle. Extremes of climate in that dry mountain air and the heat of stove-warmed houses have a disastrous effect upon fine wood-work.

Davy swore a soft-sounding but vitriolic oath, stopped in the middle of a word, and began sorrowfully fingering the mute and broken thing.

"Let's look," said Eli.

"You don't suppose *you* can mend it," the owner answered scornfully.

Eli moved the wreck to a bench where he kept his finer tools. He put the glue-pot on the stove, and taking a box lid of close-grained wood, that he happened to have by him, set to work.

Davy watched him awhile, rather impressed, as such as he often are, by any exhibition of constructive ability.

Then he became bored and wandered round the room touching things.

"Don't you *ever* get any fresh books or papers?" he said discontentedly, regarding a copy of Oman's English History and three ancient illustrated magazines with hostile eyes.

Eli was hard at work and did not answer. Presently he heard the rustle of pages being turned over.

"I say, did you write all this stuff?" Davy asked after a while, in a changed voice.

Eli looked up. His guest was holding the copy book of translations from the book of Wen-Yen.

"I wrote it, but a man called Kwon-foot-zer made it up, hundreds of years ago. A Chinaman told it all to me."

"I wish . . ." Davy said, then sighed impatiently, "Oh, what's the use? Anyone can talk."

He read another page with an absorbed air, then closed the book and replaced it on the shelf. Eli saw him take a small bottle from his pocket and swallow something he had shaken out from it.

A colour rose in his cheeks, and he came back to the bench.

Felix Schmertz outdid himself that evening, and Eli went to bed aching with laughter, but a little heart-sick for all that.

Next night the fiddle was re-strung and tuned, and Davy began to play.

The older man sat entranced. He had never heard any good music in his life, and though the violin was a bad one and the player but a mediocre executant, it was the work of a great master that he essayed to render.

Suddenly Davy threw the fiddle aside.

"Ugh! What an ugly noise!" he said.

He drew a stool to the stove and sat there, his head in his hands.

A big owl began to hoot from the roof. It seemed to drive him nearly frantic, whether with fear or anger, Eli could not tell. Man and bird swore and hooted by turns in a kind of infernal litany, till Davy seized some logs from the woodbox and went out. There came a crash

or two and then silence. After a while he opened the door, and in the act of re-entering turned and stood for a moment looking out into the night. The new-fallen snow stretched away in glimmering sheets under the light of a half moon. Every black arm of a fir tree carried a pale burden, and against the dark of the sky a faint glitter played about the scarcely seen glaciers of the triple peak.

Davy turned a wan face to Eli, and shivered.

"Fancy being lost, out among . . . all that!" he murmured, half to himself, and then came back to his seat by the fire.

"You'll never be lost, Eli," he said wistfully. "You'll always find your way."

Eli was startled. He too spoke as if to himself.

"Since I wrote those things out of the Chinaman's book, I seem to have thought more about *the* way. Everything's going the same road, after all."

"Oh, you can all talk!" said Davy.

He departed next morning, declaring he would strike whiskey or perish. Eli thought the real reason was that he wished to avoid Martindale, who with two "pups," (as he called the farming pupils whom he took from time to time) was to drive up some cattle that afternoon.

Martindale, when he arrived, was in gay spirits. Rumours of gold on the Klondyke were already rife and beef prices up in consequence. The two pups were pleasant spoken young Englishmen, distant cousins of Mrs. Martindale, and were looking about them, meanwhile learning the cattle business. Eli too had had a good season and intended to buy his pre-emption when he sold his next batch of steers, so for the rest of the evening the conversation was purely technical.

Next day, after Eli had seen his visitors off, he went towards his corral. A log had been displaced, and without noticing that it was an especially heavy one, he es-

sayed to lift it. The strain sent a pang through his chest that left him sick and giddy for a moment, and returned once or twice during the next few days, but there was work to be done, he was not one to cosset himself, and after a while he forgot the little incident altogether.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SHOT

ELI bought his pre-emption the next Spring, taking the opportunity to have it surveyed, when Martindale added yet another piece of land to his estate. Though haying was finished earlier than usual that year at Buckle's meadow, the master of the ranche felt tired, and was glad of the few weeks of comparative rest before the Autumn "round-up." For two days clouds had hung over the mountains, now they drifted down the valley, and he sat in his cabin listening to the drumming of the rain till it ceased, though mist yet steamed up from the wet earth as he went afield in the afternoon. The river was speaking with a louder voice than usual at that time of year, and he walked to the ford and sat down near the stream. The water, already thick and white like milk, was rising fast. Soon it was bank-high, and unseen boulders in the bed were grinding together with a deep, rumbling noise.

He sat there a long while.

There was something ghastly in the sudden change. A few hours before this evil white torrent had been a clear and laughing little river, flowing through meadows fringed with willow scrub, among whose tangles Michaelmas daisies were flowering.

A swirl of the roaring water splashed his feet. He drew back, and, as he did so, glanced across to the further landing. At the brink Davy Jones was spurring a miserable-looking horse. Both man and beast were caked

with mud, and the cayuse was snorting and backing from the ford. Eli sprang to his feet, shouting and waving in warning.

It was impossible to see the bed of the river, and though the depth was not great, the moving boulders and the force and pace of the stream made of the crossing a mad adventure. Davy heeded nothing. He gave a swift look behind, then drove his horse at the water. At one moment the onlooker thought both would be swept away, and his heart was sick within him. Yet he had often seen men in as great straits, unmoved, but to watch Davy in peril was to Eli like watching the danger of some fool-hardy child.

Nothing could be done, there was no help to be given. Davy was a light weight and all depended upon the strength of the horse.

With a heave and a scramble the trembling creature gained the bank, and Eli's fear turned to anger.

"You damned young idiot! Why did you cross?" he said.

Davy slid from his saddle.

"Come to the house," he answered. "Let me walk in front of the horse."

Eli took the bridle of the exhausted beast in silence. He was still hot with anger.

As they reached the first of the old river courses that seamed the meadow, he saw long fingers of white water creeping towards him through the grass; at the second he was wet to the ankle, at the third, to the knee.

Davy went quickly indoors, but before Eli had off-saddled, fed and stabled the cayuse, all the grassland was laced with streaks of moving water.

The two cabins stood at the foot of the sandhills, well above the level of the valley floor, but it was fortunate the buckets were full, or Eli would have had to go down to

the lake for a drink, since already the spring beyond the yard was turbid.

He found Davy by the stove, lighting the fire, and when it had drawn up, he hung over it, shivering.

Eli gave his guest some dry clothes in silence, and in silence Davy put them on, and neither man said a word till the evening meal was ready.

Eli's anger had abated by this, and watching Davy, he saw him look towards the window once or twice as dusk drew on. Then as Eli was about to light the lamp the other spoke.

"Haven't you anything you can put over the window? It's that devil, Tenece," he added by way of explanation.

Eli scented trouble. He hung a blanket over the window, blew out the lamp, and the two sat with no light but the glimmer from the closed door of the stove.

"He's on my trail," Davy went on in a dreamy tone. "It's a shooting matter this time, and he's a heap better at that game than I am—even if I had a gun." His voice took on a challenging note. "You don't ask me what it's about," he said. Then he stretched himself with a light laugh. "I'm not denying my Siwash friend had some reason to be annoyed. Need I say any more?"

Eli shook his head.

"I'm not putting any questions. I never have put any, but look here, Davy, you're just clamouring for trouble. Don't you think it's time to stop this foolishness?"

Instantly the other turned, snarling.

"I'm not taking any parson's talk or Dutch uncle business. If you want to throw me out, say so, and I'll go."

He moved toward the door.

Eli put out an arm and stopped him.

"It's as cheap to talk sense," he said. "Sit down."

Davy did not draw away, but stood looking at Eli for a

moment. Then he seated himself again and stared at the fire.

"I suppose I'll have to skip the country—if I can," he said at last. "None of the others would touch me while I'm with you . . . but . . . I'm not sure about Teneece. Teneece isn't like the other Siwashes. He'll ride in the dark . . . if he wants to. I might go on to-night and trust to the flood stopping him till I got clear, but my cayuse is plumb played out as you saw."

"You may thank your stars you ever got across the river on a beast like that," Eli answered.

"I had to take what I could get—I was in a hurry—Oh, it's all right—I didn't steal it. Someone lent it to me."

"A woman, of course," said Eli.

Davy shook back his hair with a self-conscious smile.

"Well, since you mention it, that was the case," he said.

Then he shivered again and stretched out his hands towards the stove.

Eli thought a moment.

"You could have one of my horses, but I guess you're pretty nearly as played out as the cayuse. Turn in now, and we'll consider things in the morning. It's only Teneece, isn't it?"

"Well, he's the only one that's likely to *do* anything," said Davy.

Eli sighed. It was becoming increasingly evident that the country would have to be skipped. He threw an old winter coat on the bunk where Davy lay. The latter drew a sleeve of the fur round his head and ears, as a man will who is accustomed to sleep in the open. Then he looked up at his host.

"You're not a bad chap, Eli. I wouldn't have come else," he said.

He snuggled down in the blankets, tucked his hands under his cheek and feel asleep like a baby.

Eli sat over the fire, thinking; then he also turned in; but he locked the door first and propped two sacks of flour against it, and set a packing-case before the window. It was not much of a defence, but it was the best that he could do and he did not really expect an attack upon the cabin. As he lay waiting for sleep the noise of the river came to him more faintly than before.

Once during the night he half roused at the sound of his mare whinnying in the stable. It was not uncommon for her to call thus to her comrades in the meadow if she heard them moving during the night. The sound was not repeated, and Eli did not awake again till past his usual hour.

A cold draught was blowing over him.

He sat up and looked around. The door was open, the blankets on Davy's bunk were thrown back, and Davy was gone.

Feeling anxious, Eli rose and looked out. The flood had subsided, only a few pools were left standing in the meadow and the voice of the stream had sunk to its usual murmur. Away to the South the mountain showed a hard white against a lowering sky. He could not see Davy, but the stable door stood open, and he was about to go in that direction, when from behind the house came the noise of a shot.

Eli caught up his rifle from the rack just inside the door, and, throwing in a cartridge as he ran, turned the corner of the building. For a moment he saw nothing but the sandhill and the dark wall of pines.

Then he caught sight of a patch of blue by the fence. Davy was lying huddled against the lower-most log.

He opened his eyes at Eli's touch.

"Don't move me," he said huskily. "He's scored a bull this time."

He coughed horribly, then his head sank against Eli's shoulder; the hand the latter touched was already growing cold.

"Tell . . . the beak . . . it . . . wasn't Teneece," he whispered.

"Who was it, Davy? You *must* tell me." Eli's voice was hoarse with passion.

A faint flicker of light came into Davy's eyes.

"Perfect stranger, I assure you," he said very distinctly and never spoke again.

Eli stood looking down at the body, then stooped and lifted it in his arms. (Who would have thought that it could weigh so heavy?) He carried it to the house, and scarcely knew if the pain at his heart was one of the body or the mind.

He laid it on the bed, put back the locks of hair from the face, then drew the grey blanket upward till it covered all.

A dizziness came over him and he must have fainted, for the next thing he knew was that he was sitting in the chair with his head resting upon the table.

He dragged himself to the bucket, drank, and splashed the cold water over his head and face, then locking the cabin door behind him, went to the stable.

His mare and the Siwash cayuse were gone, but he saw his other horses grazing in the meadow close by, and since he had taught one of them to come to his whistle, he brought it in. With difficulty he put on the saddle and bridle. The effort of tightening the cinch increased his pain, and he leant against the manager a while; then he led the horse down to the paddock where he kept the calves of his milch kine, let them through to their mothers,

mounted and started on the long road to Martindale's.

He never quite knew what happened on that thirty-mile ride. Sometimes all was clear, at others mists seemed to arise around him with a noise of confused voices talking.

Once he found himself clinging to the horn of his saddle and looking down at a brook where his horse had stayed to drink. A gleam of sunshine broke through the clouds, and he raised himself and went on. "A black light," he said to himself, over and over again, as once in the old days at Bourne.

Martindale and his wife, with the two "pups" and Jimmy, were in the yard as Eli drew near.

The child ran forward to open the gate for the approaching horseman, and looked up into the face of his friend.

"Dad!" he called sharply to his father, and there was anxiety in his childish voice.

Martindale came quickly.

"Hullo," he said, and was just in time to catch Eli as he half fell, half slipped from his horse.

CHAPTER XXXV

ELI GOES HOME

IT was too late that day for Martindale to do more than send one pupil down the valley and the other up, to warn the few men available to be ready to ride to Buckle's Meadow in the morning.

The posse set forth with the Chief of the Tsilicot Rancheree and two other Indians, to try and discover the murderer.

Everyone was certain that Tenece had committed the crime, but it could not be traced to him.

Eli's mare was found grazing on the hill, and the cayuse, after the manner of such animals, had doubtless gone back to his native range, wherever that may have been.

The tracks of both beasts and the effects of another storm of rain had blinded the fugitive's trail and all that could be discovered about Tenece was that he had gone off alone on a hunting expedition the day before the murder. When he was brought in after about a fortnight, he denied any knowledge of the dead man's movements or plans, so in the absence of other evidence, Davy's dying declaration was perforce accepted.

Eli was ill for some weeks and Mrs. Martindale and Ah Fong nursed him, the latter indeed, insisted upon physicking him with the particular sacred medicine of the Fong clan, a medicine made with strange rites and from stranger substances, in Ah Fong's native village in China.

Eli certainly began to get better soon after taking the

regulation doses and what can any doctor or patient ask more?

Lying in his bed at Martindale's, or, as he grew stronger, in a long chair on the verandah or in the sitting-room, his thoughts were strange to him. He felt Davy's death more than he would have deemed possible, and yet he would not have had that death otherwise. He had seen enough of life to know what the years bring to such as Davy. There are men who seem to be born with some incurable lesion of the soul, and strangely enough, such men have often the power to win a passionately pitiful affection from the strong in spirit.

Again and again in his own weakness of body, Eli would lie staring into the darkness, or across the sunlit hills to the sky, seeing Davy's face looking up at him from under the sleeve of the fur coat, or the laughter in his eyes over that last lie wherewith he made amends to his enemy. But mingling with those visions and forming a background to every thought, came an endless series of little scenes from his own youthful days on the Up Farm or at Bourne.

So it was that he arrived at a wondering realisation of the fact that now, after all these years and adventures, and for the first time since he had taken to the sea, every instinct of his being was drawing him towards home.

Of late years he had thought that home for him meant the little cabin in his meadow at the foot of the mountains—and it was not so.

Looking down into his heart as into a pool of still water, he saw that for him home had always meant and would always mean, the downlands and fields, the streams and woods and valleys round about Ewebourne Vale.

Our people of the chalk lands, the people of Alfred's country, are made after that fashion. They do not stay for generations in their native villages as of old; now-

adays they travel far and wide when young, but if they can, they come back.

Eli, however, did not see how it would be possible for him to go back.

All his savings had been sunk in his place up country, where the pups were staying for a while, looking after the ranch and cattle, both Eli's and Martindale's. It would be a good experience for them, their preceptor thought, before they set up for themselves.

Eli did not doubt that he would go back after a week or two and take up life as before, but Mrs. Martindale doubted.

When her patient was able to walk about a little, she issued her commands and Eli was packed into Harrison's buggy and driven down to the Point Fifty where a doctor had lately established himself.

The Point Fifty, grown to a village now, was in a ferment.

Klondyke was booming. There would be an overland route up the Caribou Road; already parties were passing up from Beechcroft, trying to get in that way. Every west-bound train was bringing crowds of gold seekers, land was "way up" already, and stores arising like mushrooms from the soil. Beechcroft was booming sure, Vancouver was booming, Victoria was booming. Seattle was booming loudest of all, and if the Point Fifty could not quite persuade itself that it was booming already, it was certain that it was just about to begin.

All this Bar talk seemed strange and unreal to Eli; it wearied him and he went early to bed. Next day he saw the doctor.

The doctor punched and prodded and listened in a would-be impressive manner. Already he had visions of the Point Fifty as a flourishing town, laid out with boarded side walks, upon which crowds of patients hustled

each other in their eagerness to reach his surgery door.

"Heart strain," said the doctor. "Nothing to worry about as yet. Avoid high altitudes, go down to the coast if possible—a tonic," he scribbled a prescription, "above all no lifting of heavy weights and no sudden jerks. Cattle work? Well, no. No, certainly not cattle. Thank you. Good-morning."

"All very well," thought Eli, "but cattle work it would have to be. What else?"

They picked up the mail on their way back. There were two letters for Eli—one from Anne Brown, which he read first. She and Amos were leaving Bourne. They were going to live near a married daughter at Wincombe, a little village just under the crest of the southern range of downs. Eli had driven sheep that way and remembered it well. Amos had a job at a farm near by, not very good money but a light job, and Amos was getting on in years and so was she. All the rest of the family was scattered. Most of them were abroad. Rebecca was a good daughter and her children were good children, and Anne would like to be near them.

Eli had a vision of Rebecca as he had last seen her, dressed in a short pink pinny, sitting on the door-step and screaming because the kitten had scratched her bare legs.

"Getting on in years!" Why, he was getting on in years himself.

He opened the other letter, a typewritten screed, and at first hardly grasped the meaning. He had almost forgotten that he was the owner of the cabbage garden he had bought to help Ah Fong. Now someone wanted to buy it from him.

He took the letter in to Martindale and the two had a long talk that evening during which Eli repeated the doctor's verdict.

Martindale looked grave and poked the stove.

"It's about what the missus expected," he said at last. "Look here, Buckle, the pups want to buy a place and cattle, they've not heard of anything yet. You've got some pretty good meadows up there, and they could put in a bit of capital. They seem to have taken to the *illahee*. Should you feel inclined to sell?"

So it was arranged, and Buckle never went back to his meadow again.

The pups took over the whole place as it stood. They packed and sent down Eli's few personal belongings, including the copy book and Davy's fiddle.

Martindale's lawyer at Beechcroft obtained a good price for the Chinaman's garden, and settled matters with the celestial tenant to everyone's satisfaction.

All this took time, but the Martindales insisted upon keeping Eli with them till the business was finished.

At last, one day in spring, Martindale drove him down to the mail. Just before rounding the sandy bluffs he turned and looked back. Mrs. Martindale and Jimmy were waving to him from the garden gate, while from the back door Ah Fong was signalling with a large white kitchen cloth, or, as he called it "chicken towdle."

Then it was Eli learned that it was possible to be homesick for two places at once, and those two with the breadth of the world between them.

And so he came back, but not to Bourne. Even after all these years he had no wish to live there.

About five miles from the mouth of the Ewebourne in a southward-looking hollow of Winchcombe Down he found a little cottage with a garden and a grassy orchard.

It had never belonged to any of the big estates. Perhaps some squatter had cut it out of the waste, much as Inoutsin had helped himself to a shred of Martindale's range.

Later owners had rebuilt the little dwelling; the last, a pious old Methodist, who had inherited it late in life, had changed the ancient satiric name of Starveall Close, to Beulah.

It was for sale when Eli arrived in England and came to visit his old friends the Browns. Winchcombe is out of the world and far from towns and trains and Eli bought the little place very cheaply. He had lived upon it some years when I found a refuge there on the foggy night I have spoken of in the first chapter of this tale, and there I spent many happy times during all my undergraduate days.

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VII: BEULAH

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VII: BEULAH

CHAPTER XXXVI

ELI SETS ME ON MY WAY

THE last time I saw Eli was on a day early in March, six years after our first meeting.

I had taken my degree previously, and had arranged to join a scientific expedition then studying the coast tribes of North-Western Canada. I was to report at Victoria, and meant to spend a couple of months up country on my way out. Since I was to depart by train from Crayford that afternoon, Eli offered to walk part of the road with me; he would have driven me down in his little cart with the old grey pony, but that later on he was to go in the opposite direction to measure a piece of land for one man, and to doctor a sick cow for another. He was continually in request among his neighbours for odd jobs of all sorts, and his own garden and bees and chickens filled up his time pretty thoroughly. With these activities and the interest on the remainder of his capital, he made out a very fair living for a man of his frugal habits.

It was, however, not only the folk who employed him who sought him out, for though in some ways his life on Winchcombe Down was nearly as unaccompanied as that he had led at Buckle's Meadow, yet he appeared to exercise an odd and unsought kind of influence over his sparsely scattered neighbours and acquaintances, particularly over the younger among them.

It was, I fancied, especially when they were in difficulty that some obscure instinct led them to Beulah, much as it may have led their forefathers to visit a pagan wise man at a "high place," or the hermit of some solitary Christian shrine.

Now and again a rough-looking farm or shepherd lad would present himself, apparently for no particular reason, having often walked a long distance over the Downs. Such a visitor would maybe arrive looking harassed or puzzled or forlorn, and would sit watching Eli carve, or hang about and perhaps lend a hand while he worked in his orchard or garden. These youths never seemed to have much to say to him or he to them, but after an hour or so spent in his company, would depart apparently well satisfied with the interview.

Less often the elder schoolgirls or young women just going out into the world, would stay at his gate and shyly offer a basket of blackberries or a bunch of violets, or beg a slip from one of his garden plants as an excuse for their presence; and whenever the small boys from the Vicarage had really serious trouble with their elders, their first impulse seemed to be to escape to the Downs and take refuge with "Mr. Buckle."

So much was this the case, that once I actually discovered their mother (under pretext of buying honey) consulting my highly unorthodox friend as to the upbringing of her youngest and naughtiest son. As far as I could make out, Eli met her need merely by an attentive silence, which the good lady seemed to find very helpful and comforting.

On looking back, I am not sure that it was not as a solace to some unspoken youthful troubles of my own that I first began to frequent his society, though the after years ripened our friendship into something less egotistical on my part, or at least I trust so.

Upon the day I am speaking of, the last we ever spent together, our path lay over the down, and on the crest we met Anne Brown, trudging sturdily home with a string-bag full of groceries. She had paid her weekly visit to Crayford, where she was wont to purchase commodities which she referred to by strange names—"zebras," for instance, or "a little Quaker for breakfast."

"So you be goin' abroad, Master Freddy?" she said. She is my grand-nurse, so to speak, and I shall always be "Master Freddy" to her. I told her of my plans, and how I had already called at her cottage to say good-bye, and had left a message for her with Rebecca.

"Ah, well," she said, "all the young volk goes." She turned and looked at the country spread out beneath us. A train went hurrying westward, threading a slender trail of smoke among the clumps of trees in the valley, as a woman slips a riband among laces. "You'd think there was land enough in England," she said, "but there wasn't room for my lads. Five boys as lived to grow up, I had, and not one anear me now. Canada and Australia and the Argentine—and Johnny as was killed in the Boer War. Well, good-bye, Master Freddy, an' good luck to 'ee."

She picked up her burden and went on, and we walked in silence for a while. A gleam of sunshine fell from between the clouds, picking out a rise here and a stretch of pasture there, and touching the hills on the Northern horizon with a pale light. A lark began to sing above us.

"Smells a bit Spring-like already," said Eli, sniffing a waft from a tuft of thyme bruised by our passing feet.

"The Chinook will be blowing soon, and I'll be among the mountains before a month's out," I said. "Any messages for the upper country, Eli?"

"To the Martindales, of course, if you go so far, and Harrison, and Ah Fong, if he's still there. There's no one else now that would remember me."

"I'd not make too sure of that," I answered.

"Well, I led a pretty lonely life out there," he said. "Come to think of it, that seems mostly to have been the way with me. Way with all of us, I suppose—really."

"Don't you want to see it again?" I asked. "Ever since I went there the smell of a bit of pinewood burning makes me crazy to get back."

"Aye," he answered, "camp-fire smoke and kanicanic scrub, and the sage-brush on the hillsides. There's other smells too, hot smells in the tropics, and tar, and Japanese tobacco. The world's big, and you're young, with it all before you. But one doesn't want to cut the same trail twice."

"Doesn't one?" I asked curiously.

"I don't," he answered. "And I doubt if you will," he smiled. "If I go West before you come back, you needn't be afraid to sleep at Beulah. I don't think my ghost'll do much hauntin'."

"Maybe I'd like your ghost better than nothing, Eli."

"No, you wouldn't, lad. Second-hand things be no use to the jikes o' you and me."

"I hadn't looked at it that way," I said, after some thinking, "but it's true. Eli the window cleaner! I always seem to see things clearer after a visit to Beulah."

"Window cleaner!" said Eli, and smiled again. "Aye, 'tis best to clean the windows now and again—till 'tis time to break 'em and go through."

We parted at the stile where the path turns downwards. At the foot of the hill the way leads into a little wood, where the primroses were already peeping; it was an early season that year. I looked back and upwards, to see Eli's tall figure marching homewards along the sky-line.

I wrote to him once or twice while I was away, and had one letter from him in return.

He had not been very well, and Anne and Rebecca had insisted upon his having the latter's youngest boy, Jacky, to sleep at the cottage. "I've left your rooms as they were," he said; "Jacky has a cot-bed in mine. He is a good little chap, but I wish he didn't snore."

He went on to say that his health was better again at the time of writing, and that "things are not going amiss, inside or out"—a cryptic saying over which I pondered somewhat, as I think was intended.

It was not till the following May that I had news of his death, which had taken place two months earlier.

The announcement came from Messrs. Fairford & Pillinger, lawyers, in Crayford. They had sold Eli his cottage when he came to Winchcombe, and he had nominated Mr. Pillinger executor under his will. The letter informed me that "our esteemed client, Mr. Buckle," had left me the trifles I have already referred to, and that Mrs. Anne Brown, of Downfoot Cottages, who had inherited Mr. Buckle's real estate (somehow I had never thought of Beulah as "real estate"), had kindly offered to take care of the legacy pending my instructions.

I put off sending any instructions, beyond writing to thank Anne, as I was expecting to return home at once, but I was delayed, and that Summer the world went to war. I joined a Canadian regiment, and in due time went to war myself, without having any opportunity to visit Winchcombe till a shrapnel wound in the shoulder put an end to my military career.

It was during my time in hospital that this tale came to be written thus far. To-morrow I go to seek Anne Brown, and hear what more she may have to tell me of Eli.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A GOOD-BYE

THE war service of the Great Western line made it difficult for me to reach Winchcombe in one day, so I decided to stay the night at Crayford in the old coaching inn on the bank of the river.

The landlord greeted me in kindly fashion. He, too, had known Eli in the good days passed by. After some local gossip, he began to speak of his two boys, the one that had been killed at Gallipoli, and the other then fighting in France. He sighed but already the cataclysmal aspect of the war had passed by in his mind, and it had become a normal weariness in life, a thing that must be "put through," and till then, endured.

He drew the blinds with care. Zeppelins had never come that way, but one must keep the law; he was a special constable himself, he said.

After my meal I went out and walked by the stream for some little distance. It was a darkish evening, for though an easterly wind was blowing, the air was damp and clouds hung low in the sky, while every window in the little town and outlying cottages was blinded. The river here runs through the meadows in a tangle of sleughs and irrigating ditches looping about the course of the canal, and every runnel was full with the flood water that splashed over the weirs and chuckled under the culverts.

To the eastward towards Oldbury a dull glow hung above the munition works by the junction, where shone

the only outside lights permitted now, since they could be extinguished by the turn of a switch at any threat from the sky. From Crayford and Oldbury and Bourne, country lasses were toiling beneath that glare, girls who would be the women of the new England Eli had not lived to see.

The long journey had jarred my shoulder, so presently I stayed to rest in a dip of the road with a high bank to one side and on the other the water meadows stretching away towards the ridges that divide the Cray Valley from Ewebourne Vale.

Somewhere in the obscurity a telegraph wire sang overhead. Was it fancy, or could I hear through that and the whisper of many streams and through the rustle of the chill wind—so faint that it was more a feeling than a sound—a thud and mutter as of voices, which, thank God, have never spoken in earnest from these English hills.

It seemed incredible, yet was it possible that I, who had lived among them and served them, could mistake those voices of dread?

Perhaps it was but the trickery of ears that had been filled with roarings through many months of strain; the trickery that the nurses in every hospital know well, when they move, soft-footed, down the wards at night to soothe some fevered boy (some shepherd lad it may be, such as Eli once had been) starting awake with the pitifully familiar cry,

“The guns, sister! Don’t you hear the guns?”

I turned and went back, I who had also dreamed such fever dreams, but I slept well enough at the John of Gaunt that night, and the next day, when I visited Mr. Pillinger in his office, I found myself back in Eli’s England once more.

He was a bald little man, Mr. Pillinger—“Young

Stowell Pillinger," Crayford folk were wont to call him, to distinguish him from his father, dead twenty years ago.

He had a round apple face and wore round glasses over round eyes, and had a round little mouth that emitted small popping noises when it might have been at rest.

Mr. Pillinger's office was on the second story of a sunny old Georgian house in the High Street. I was admitted by a sheep faced elderly clerk into a glass-panelled den which acted as a sort of strainer to the inner sanctum where Mr. Pillinger sat at a table heaped with ancient and unimportant-looking papers.

He shook hands with extreme cordiality, but had not the slightest idea who I was till I told him.

Yes, Mrs. Brown and her husband were living at Beulah now. Pretty little place! Good situation! Fine air! Mr. Buckle had left it to her. Had left rather a curious will, one of those sixpenny forms—oh, quite in order, quite—still—! Mr. Pillinger had accepted the executorship, his partner, Mr. Fairford, advised it. Old client, Mr. Buckle, very respectable man, very respectable indeed—a *little* eccentric, didn't I think? Of course the property was ve-ry small, still, a sixpenny form . . . Well! well! Mr. Buckle desired that the residue of his estate after all expenses were paid, should be realised and expended upon . . . where was the memorandum . . . *Davis!* The clerk appeared . . . oh! yes, thank you—on . . . er . . . Mr. Pillinger consulted the paper—"On helping people to study books by the old Chinese writer Quon-foot-zer, sometimes called Confucius."

Mr. Pillinger looked at me over his spectacles, popping his lips apologetically.

He confessed he had felt puzzled, Mr. Fairford had also been puzzled, as to how it would be best to carry out the testator's wishes. They had made inquiries, and had

also consulted the Rector, who was a very learned man. The Rector had also made inquiries. There was, it appeared, a college for Missionary students of the Church of England in . . . er . . . Shanghai, he believed . . . or was it Pekin? Anyway the Bishop was much interested in it. They made a point of instructing the students of this College in . . . er . . . the tenets they would have to combat in the Mission field, especially Confucianism. It seemed just what was required, and the Bishop had written such a *very* nice letter—it was here somewhere—*Davis!*

I repressed a wild desire to laugh, and said that I would not trouble Mr. Davis to find the letter as I was going on to Winchcombe, and was rather pressed for time.

Then I should doubtless visit Mr. Buckle's grave in the churchyard there, Mr. Pillinger opined. Mr. Fairford, who had great taste, had himself selected the monument. Mr. Pillinger was sure I should be pleased with it—he popped a little dubiously for a moment or two. The . . . er . . . question of an inscription had also been a little difficult, Mr. Buckle's religious opinions being . . . er . . . what they were.

"*What* were Mr. Buckle's religious opinions?" I asked as innocently as I could.

"Well, that *was* the difficulty," murmured Mr. Pillinger. Mr. Fairford thought a text would look well . . . nothing marked, of course . . . The stonemason had made suggestions . . . but the speaker had persuaded him just to put "O Rest," the two first words of that beautiful solo in the Elijah . . . Mendelssohn's you know.

He breathed the faintest indication of the opening bars of the melody, and I felt sure that he must be a leading light in the local Choral Society.

"A beautiful aspiration in itself," he concluded with a

gentle sigh, "and of course to a musician like myself . . ."

"Of course," I said and rose to go. As I passed back through the strainer and down the stairs I heard Mr. Pillinger tootling softly to himself,

"Ahnd hee shahll gee-ive thee thy hear-rrts dee-si-eere," he sang in his high, throaty little tenor.

What was Eli's heart's desire I wondered? And had he perchance found it now?

I took the hotel pony cart up to Beulah, and dismissed it as I intended to walk back.

Amos Brown was working in the garden.

"The missus be expectin' 'ee," he said, then he looked at the patch he was digging. "Turns up bad," he remarked, "I allus told Eli 'twas chalk this bit o' land needed, but 'a 'ouldn't believe I."

He drove his spade into the earth once more, and I went on to the house.

Anne was pleased to see me, and cosseted me for a while, but she did not say much at first. Then Amos came in and the grandson, little Jacky, and she gave us tea, after which tongues were loosened somewhat.

Anne showed me the fiddle Eli had wished me to have, and while she was upstairs fetching it, Amos looked round the kitchen from his chair by the fire.

"Zim's strange ter think as us should 'a fallen heir to the zame man twict in a manner o' speakin'," he said. "'Twas a queer business 'bout Eli, wasn't it? Twelve-month ago 'twere now."

"Thirteen months, grandfather," amended Jacky from a table by the window, where he was making a drawing in his school note-book.

Anne came back with the fiddle, and I took it from her and held it awhile.

"Tell me about it all," I said, "I have heard no details."

They told me in their usual duet—how Eli had been ailing that winter before the war, sometimes better and sometimes worse. Early in March he had had "a bad turn," but he would not have anyone with him at night except Jacky, who could be sent to call Anne or Rebecca, should one of them be wanted. Eli always slept with a light burning in case he should need the medicine the doctor had given him. Anne and Rebecca did his housework in the day.

"'Twas of a Thursday," Anne said, "and 'twas snowing a bit when I left after I got him and Jacky their tea. Eli, he seemed fer ter be pretty sprack that night, an' he was a-laughin' with Jacky an' me. I was a-hunting for my spectacles an' couldn't find 'em, an' 'Look nearer home, Anne,' a' says, and there they was on my forehead, an' 'a says, 'That's like me, Anne. I've a-spent sixty years an' been all over the world to find summat as I had all the while.'"

"Must a-been light-'eaded," said Amos. "I ne'er 'eard as he was looking fer aught."

"It might a-been two o'clock that night, or maybe three," Anne went on, "when I heard Jacky banging at the door an' callin', an' I went down an' let un in, an' the poor child was a-shiverin' and a-cryin' . . ."

"I wasn't crying," interposed Jacky firmly, "'twas only a' cold in me eyes."

Anne took no notice of the interruption, but continued her story.

"So I says, 'Now dontee wake your grandfather,' I says, 'nor your mother neither,' I says, (for Rebecca she'd been very poorly wi' that nasty fluency) an' Jacky he told me as he'd woke up an' found Eli dressed and

just going down an' looking strange like. So 'a nips outer bed an' runs after un, and 'What's the matter, Mr. Buckle?' 'a says, an' Eli he says, 'Run back to bed, Jacky, and keep warm. 'Tis the crying,' 'a says, ' 'tis the crying and I must go.' "

"Must ha' been dreamin' or light-'eaded, or summat," Amos insisted.

Jacky looked up.

"He wasn't dreaming, grandfather. His eyes was wide open. Wide open and shining."

"And at that 'a went out," Anne continued, "and Jacky he waited a bit, and then 'a grew frightened an' run down to me, but first 'a had the sense to make up the fire. 'Twasn't snowing then, but 'twas all white over the hills and everywhere, and what wi' that and the stars us could see well enough, an' us hadn't no more nor got to 's door when I sees Eli a-comin'. 'An' you've gi'en I a fair fright,' I says, when he got inside. 'You did ought to be ashamed o' yourself,' I says, an' then I see as 'a had a lamb under's coat.

" 'A puts it down by the fire, an' 'Thank you for coming, Anne,' 'a says, 'but I didn't want to trouble anyone,' 'a says, an' then 'a sits down sudden-like on the couch there.

"So I says, 'You lie down where you be an' I'll warm up some milk for 'ee.' 'A was always fond of a drop o' warm milk, was Eli.

" 'Give some to the lamb, 'tis fair perished,' 'a says.

"Then 'a laid down an' I puts on the milk, and when 'twas hot I pours it out, but when I takes it over to un . . . well . . . then I saw 'a was gone . . .

"Died just like that. Quiet, same as his grandmer done."

I asked Anne to keep the books and the fiddle for me

a while longer, but I said I would take the old copy book and the flints. Anne picked them out of the candle box and wrapped them up in a newspaper.

She and Amos offered to walk as far as the churchyard with me and show me the grave.

Mr. Fairford's "taste" had run in the direction of a gaunt white cross festooned in a Bacchanalian sort of fashion with a skew-ways wreath of marble passion flowers, and the inscription announced that Eli had died highly respected, in the sixty-fourth year of his age. This statement was followed by "the text" chosen by Mr. Pillinger, and a stone curb filled in with marble clippings ensured that no least weed or blade of grass should grow above the bones of the man who had loved this green earth and all her living things so well.

I left the Browns standing there in the evening sunshine and took the short cut over the down that joins the foot-path to Crayford. At the spot where I had last spoken to Eli Anne's parcel began to come undone, and I stayed to wrap up the flints afresh. I was just about to go onward when I noticed a scrap of torn paper clinging to the sleeve of my coat.

It was the little poem I had seen on the evening I first met my friend.

This time I read it through—

"Armida circled with glory,
Lord of the Infinite Light,
Thine are the beacons that beckon
Spirits of men through the night.
Those who fare high on the mountains
May walk by the stars and the moon,
And the priests in the temple gardens
Have the temple lamps for their guides,
But the Pilgrims that wend through the valley

They come, be it late, be it soon,
Past the gleam from a woman's window
To the place where Thy peace abides."

That was all, but I shall not part from the dusty bit of paper, for it came to me on that golden April evening with the grace of a very characteristic little farewell.

FINIS

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